Image of the Beloved

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Image of the Beloved

by wormsin

Summary

Inevitably, Will wondered how Hannibal was coping with the trauma.

He had no doubt that Hannibal was handling it elegantly.

He said he wouldn't abandon you, *a vile thought twisted through Will's mind. But there was no answer to that accusation. There was no way for Hannibal to hold true to his promise to see Will through this darkness. Maybe if they had never been lovers, his psychiatrist would help him now. Maybe in that world, Will could peel away the cloying tar from his skin and rebuild a home beneath his ribs. The winter might warm and expose the earth beneath, and Will would go digging for the bodies buried there, excavating and tilling the soil so that he was not just death.*

There will yet be a spring for us, *Hannibal's voice came.* For you, myself, and Abigail.

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Will Graham is imprisoned in the BSHCI and believes himself to be the Copycat Killer. He has killed Abigail, and though Hannibal survived Will's murderous psychotic episode, their relationship has not. Will may no longer be sick, but his life is over.

(Or so he tells himself, hands over his eyes.)

Sequel to *A Mirror in the Dark*

Notes

forewarning:

this is the sequel to A Mirror in the Dark. it's probably confusing to read this one without reading the other. this fic is going to be different from Mirror: shorter, darker, more brutal, and with an ending instead of a cliffhanger. I want to talk briefly about the subject matter of this fic without spoiling any particulars, so you know what you're getting into.

this is erotic horror. there is less erotica in Beloved as was in Mirrors, and most of it happens in "fantasies". that means that a lot of the erotica happens in Will's own head, right alongside

the psychological horror. there will be dark fantasies. there will be hot nightmares. there will be repressed memories that paint the events of Mirrors in a different light. it's gonna be depraved. there will be fantasies about self-harm and non-con, and a ton of unsafe, insane BDSM-adjacent practices.

my writing does not reflect my real world attitudes towards real world mental illness and violence. my writing reflects my erotic attitudes towards fictionalized mental illness and violence. cool? good. also... I spent so much effort setting up everything in Mirror for this, trust me to take you through it. it's going to be fun.

updates sundays. say hi on tumblr.

The Cage

Will stood before the tall, bay windows, staring not at his reflection or the stormy night beyond, but at the image of Hannibal Lecter's office caught in the glass. A fire in the fireplace and the dim light from designer lamps conspired to show the room as a moody, golden mirage. His imagination provided every detail in obsessive accuracy, the smell of bourbon, antique paper, charcoal, and leather stirring memories that made Will's chest ache.

Though his imagination had made a monster of him, Will now used it to survive his imprisonment.

In his mind, Will did not wear the uniform jumpsuit of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. His hair was not wild and overgrown, nor his stubble patchy. Here Will wore his previous uniform: white t-shirt under a soft flannel shirt, belted beneath khaki pants that didn't quite fit. Something he would have worn before this whole nightmare began. His own clothes. Not even the ones that Hannibal had bought him without his permission, filling a drawer as a partner might in the stage before living together was a topic of conversation. Will would never touch those again, even given the choice, in some fragile future where the two men could exist in the same room outside of Will’s imagination.

And Hannibal -- Hannibal was dressed to the fucking nines. Will turned to appreciate the chocolate brown chevron suit and burnt orange shirt, the suggestion of gold in his paisley tie and pocket square, how he was completely comfortable in his vibrancy and indulgence like Hannibal Lecter should be. The imagined Hannibal leaned against his desk, appearing softly pleased with Will's company.

"You wanted to see me," Hannibal observed.

Will gave a small nod to the surroundings. "I always want to see you," he confessed somberly. "I just don't want you to see me."

Hannibal tilted his head. "Because you are ashamed of your current state?"

Will chuckled bitterly. "I'm pretty sure that the greatest kindness I could do you at this point is never to interact with you again."

"Yet here we are."

"Sorry."

Hannibal smiled. He moved to sit in his usual chair and Will did the same. The twin chairs were stationed close to each other, so that if the men stretched their legs the tips of their shoes would touch; or if they both leaned forward, elbows on their knees to share an intimate thought, they would be one gesture apart. "You need me to survive your current predicament," Hannibal said as he got comfortable, folding his hands on a crossed leg. "To make sense of yourself and what you have done. The fact that our conversation is happening in your mind should not preclude its usefulness."

"If my lawyer and I could prove this conversation was taking place, I'd have the insanity plea in the bag," Will replied, leaning back in the chair.

Hannibal's eyes shone with amusement. "Deflecting with your own mind. Really, Will, there is no need."

"Habits die hard."

"You don't believe that you're insane."

Will frowned at the man sitting across from him. It was odd to be surprised by his own mind. "I don't remember the fact that I killed six people," Will reminded his companion. "I have to be insane."

"You don't feel insane now."

That was true. For the first time in months and months, Will's head was clear. "I got better," he countered.

"Ah, yes. The encephalitis that caused you to lose time for your horrific, premeditated kills. The dementia that resulted in your delusions. Tell me, Will: did an illness turn you into a serial killer?"

"I got lost in their minds," Will said. "Couldn't get them out of my head."

"Not just interpreting the evidence, then."

Hannibal was so embedded in his mind that Will had no trouble holding a conversation with him in his own fantasy, but Will couldn't place the amusement or logic behind his words. "I killed six people and nearly killed you," Will reiterated softly.

Hannibal examined him gently, with no hurt or hardness for the fact that Will had strung him up with barbed wire and fishing hooks like a bloody puppet. Hannibal adjusted his cuffs, black cufflinks catching the fire for a moment, by all appearances undisturbed. "Some version of you did," he replied, "or one of the killers in your head."

"Don't circumnavigate my responsibility," Will said with a touch of cold.

"Should we get to it directly then?" Hannibal prompted. "Can you be held responsible for acts outside of your control? For what you do not remember?"

"I bear responsibility regardless of what the court decides," Will replied. "And it bothers me to think that you might make excuses for me."

"Is that why you have conjured this conversation?" Hannibal asked, curious. "To confess your sins and find repentance in punishment by my hand?"

Will smirked. "You're the only person whose judgement I value."

"How do you think I would judge you?"

“Why don’t you tell me?”

Hannibal’s eyes roamed Will’s face, hungry for the small gestures knotted there. And then his amusement disappeared, his entire demeanor smoothing out and retracting. “I cannot condemn your actions without as well condemning myself,” Hannibal said in a flat voice.

A sharp pain struck Will’s hands and he hissed. Looking down he saw multiple fishing hooks piercing through his hand, the blood oozing slowly between the metal. At the end of each hook was a taut red line. The room was suddenly filled with a tight web of red, thin lines that connected Will to Hannibal, who bore mirror-image hooks between the joints of his fingers. If Hannibal was prone to gesticulate while speaking, Will would see the lines move each joint. Puppets, both of them. But Hannibal had always conserved his movement, and so the web was still. As Hannibal spoke, small gashes opened up on his face like bloody eyes, and Will felt the same wounds burn and bleed down his cheeks. Beneath his clothes, his skin blinked with small cuts. "It seems our session is at an end," Hannibal said, blood dribbling down his chin. "Until next time."

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From one hospital to another. Treated for the encephalitis and sufficiently recovered from surgery on his leg, Will Graham was escorted to his new home at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Dr. Chilton placed his new celebrity patient in a seclusion room in a padded jumpsuit with mittens on his hands. The room contained a total of a mattress and nothing else. With the mittens Will could not harm himself even if there was a tool in sight to use; the most Will could do with his hands was fish out his dick from the fold of the jumpsuit to piss on the drain in the corner. With the padded helmet, he could not even bash his skull against the walls -- or, he could, but would not do satisfactory damage before the nurse watching outside would intervene.

They thought he would try to kill himself again. Will had never felt suicidal, not even when he had driven the hunting knife into his thigh the second time. Even knowing that he had been compelled to cut out his femoral artery like an exorcism, it did not feel like a suicide attempt. Will was no longer delusional, and he did not want to die, but something needed to break and crushing his skull against the wall would be so goddamn satisfying.

Nothing broke. After a week, the padded helmet came off. Will did not bash his head into the wall. In another week, the mittens came off and he was permitted a standard jumpsuit. He did not pull out his hair or scratch the skin from his forearms, but he did worry the nail of his thumb into the skin of his wrist, a steadily growing welt under the cuff of his uniform that ached as a small, brittle satisfaction.

Even though he showed no signs of self-harm, Will was kept in the seclusion room. He had to be escorted to a bathroom with no stall door whenever he needed to shit. Maybe if Will deigned to talk to Dr. Chilton he could convince the presiding doctor that he was not suicidal or a self-harm risk. But Will had cut his thigh nearly to the bone, and had cutting scars on his

hips and thighs, and was suspected to be a dangerously violent criminal. When Dr. Chilton had found out about the scars he had asked Will about self-harm in one of their daily ‘conversations’. Will did not reply. He had not said a word to Dr. Chilton since his incarceration.

The institutionalization was everything Will had feared as a young man, but he did not care enough about himself to actually be afraid, now that his past nightmare was his reality. Besides, another nightmare loomed far larger. The worst had happened, more terrible than even Will could imagine. He could remember what it felt like to braid Abigail's shorn hair while her blood soaked through the knees of his pants, cold and sticky.

Will was the Copycat Killer. His reality had fractured and unbeknownst to him, he had murdered five people. Then Abigail. And while her blood was still warm on his hands, Will had abused Hannibal.

The irony was not lost on Will that now that he was in an institution, he was no longer losing his mind.

He could honestly use some lost time right about now.

For his interviews Will was strapped to a gurney and escorted to a bare room with one glass wall separating him from his audience. Then the nurse would elevate the gurney perpendicularly so Will could stand on the footrest, still strapped in place. Only then would the nurse unclip his face mask. It was wholly unnecessary, but Will knew he would be sorely tempted to bash his head against the iron bars of the normal interview cells. God, this place was a zoo.

"Dr. Chilton tells me you haven't been cooperative," Alana said through the wall of plexiglass.

"I haven't broken any rules or disobeyed any orders," Will replied dully.

Alana raised her eyebrows. "You haven't said a word to Dr. Chilton and you haven't been eating."

That wasn't entirely true. Will had mostly been avoiding the solids. "You're my doctor, not Chilton,” he replied. "And I'm just trying to have fewer bowel movements. I'm a bit tired of the bathroom escort."

"I'm working on getting you moved to a proper cell. Dr. Chilton is convinced that you are biding your time for a suicide attempt, or a spree that begins with a self-inflicted injury."

Will was grateful for her straightforwardness. Alana was a good advocate for him, and had yet to abandon him to his fate. In the scant two months that they had been patient and doctor before Will's crimes were discovered, they had slowly built a report. It was a fragile relationship, built on a weak foundation and battered by the storm of Will’s mental illness; but despite the distrust and frustration from both sides and the revelation of Will’s violence, it had survived. So far.

Alana was, of course, devastated by Will's mental breakdown and the blood on his hands. Still, she showed up as often as she could to the hospital, dressed in patterned wrapped dresses or blouses and bright pencil skirts, clothes that clung smartly to her small, curvy frame. Alana had never shied away from the fact that she was beautiful, even now in their desperate circumstances, which Will was oddly thankful for. She was not just here out of guilt. Dr. Bloom was here to see her patient.

"Dr. Chilton doesn't think I'm suicidal," Will said, knowing the man was watching and taking a modicum of pleasure in bearing the man's motivations. "He's maneuvering to negotiate my compliance, and enjoys seeing me debased."

Alana recrossed her legs and frowned, but she didn't challenge his evaluation. "Would you talk to Dr. Chilton if it meant transferring you to a normal cell? Toilet's included, I hear."

Will shrugged as much as he could, a slight lift of his shoulders. "I don't really care, Dr. Bloom."

"That worries me, Will."

"The thing about hitting rock bottom is you stop worrying about anything getting worse," Will replied with a brittle smile. "I'm free of fear. Can't hurt anyone again."

Alana dropped her eyes for a moment, saddened. "It will be hard to help you if you don't want or feel you deserve to improve," she said, lifting her face to him once more.

"I know," Will replied. He might not be suicidal but he didn't have much of a will to live. "If I continue to behave, Dr. Chilton will eventually transfer me to a proper cell. Until then…" Will shrugged again. Either he had all the time in the world, or his insanity plea would fail and he would get the chair.

Will saw the clench in Alana's jaw and wondered, for a moment, if she was going to voice her anger to him. "You never talked to me about the self-harm," she said instead.

"There are many things I wish I had told you," Will replied. If he had been forthcoming with his symptoms, Alana might have convinced him to check himself into a hospital. She might have pointed out that Hannibal's bias was a danger to both him and Will, and be able to back up that claim. Abigail might still be alive. Might, might, might. Everyone adjacent to Will's deteriorating mental health had granted him exceptions for it. Now they knew better.

"When did it start?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It doesn't matter when you started cutting, or that you did it at all?"

"Relative to everything else, it seems trivial, wouldn't you say?"

"No, I wouldn't. You nearly died from blood loss."

"I am not suicidal and will not harm myself."

“Good,” Alana said, frustrated. “Now that I’ve verified that my patient is no longer in immediate danger, I’ll just leave. Job’s done.”

“I don’t see the point in talking about it,” Will said tightly. “I was in pain, I hurt myself, I hurt others. Now I cannot.”

“Case closed.”

“So it seems.”

Alana leaned forward. “Even if you are done with the story, there are those of us who still have questions. Myself, Jack. Abigail’s body still hasn’t been found.”

“I don’t have that answer,” Will snapped.

“Look for it, Will. Help us find the missing pieces.”

But how could he, when the very act of looking felt like being flayed alive?

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Dr. Frederick Chilton was, as he was every day, impeccably dressed and comporting himself with the air of a contemporary aristocrat -- perfectly parted hair, charming mannerisms, seemingly unflappable. The act would have been convincing, honestly, if Will had never met Hannibal Lecter. What Dr. Chilton wore as an affectation, Hannibal lived and breathed, a true eccentric and truly enjoying the beautiful clothes he wore without care for what anyone thought. Dr. Chilton wanted attention and prestige, while Hannibal simply had both. And Will had spent enough time in Hannibal Lecter's walk-in closet to identify Chilton’s shirt as a polyester blend. In fact, since Will had nothing better to do during their conversations, he had taken to cataloguing Dr. Chilton's wardrobe, and had a pretty good idea of its size due to today’s repeat-performance blazer.

"Good afternoon, Will," Dr. Chilton said jovially, using his first name as if to affect some absence camaraderie, but really because he suspected it bothered his patient. "How are you? Did you have a pleasant visit with Dr. Bloom?"

As if he hadn't been listening. Will said nothing.

Chilton took his seat, smoothing out invisible wrinkles on his slacks. "I am glad that Dr. Bloom can visit us as frequently as she does, since you refuse to talk to me. I wonder how long it will last." He smiled. "I've been in charge of this hospital for many years, Will, so let me assure you that even the most well-meaning of visitors eventually lose faith."

Will had been standing for nearly two-hours by now, since Dr. Chilton had kept him in this interview room after his conversation with Alana. He was trying to tire Will out, and his legs were aching. They would give out before he spoke.

Chilton gave him a moment to consider responding, only polite, before continuing. "Dr. Bloom will support you up to a point, Will, but it is unhealthy to only rely on her. You will speak with me, eventually." He sounded unconcerned.

Will knew he would be abandoned, eventually. Even by Alana. Jack had yet to visit him since the hospital. Will had no one else that even approached "friends"; maybe Beverly, maybe she would come once. Will had been alone so long and the closest thing to companionship he had had in years was Hannibal and Abigail. And, well.

Dr. Chilton had almost been the only one to bring Will flowers in the hospital. Will asked the nurse to move them out of his field of vision so he didn't need to be reminded of the man.

Almost: except for the dead carnation Hannibal had left on his table.

Because Hannibal had given him flowers, just once: red carnations for passion, sweet william bulbs of red on white like clusters of bloody eyes. /My sweet Will./ For masculinity, finesse, perfection. Will had looked up the meanings online, later, embarrassed, because he knew that Hannibal's dining room centerpieces were made with exacting grace and intention, so the flowers must have meaning. But Will couldn't bring himself to ask outright what the bouquet meant; couldn't even bring himself to take them home and instead scattered the flowers around Hannibal's home where they remained long after they rotted.

"Do I have your attention, Will?" Dr. Chilton asked. Will looked at him. "Good. As I was saying. We do not, actually, have all the time in the world to outlive your stubbornness. We might, depending on the judge and jury; and I sincerely hope that your insanity plea is successful." He paused for a breath, settling his hands in his lap. "But I cannot provide a credible evaluation of your sanity or lack thereof at the time of your suspected murders, if you do not speak to me.

"You must understand how it looks," Dr. Chilton continued, leaning forward. "A man seems by all outward appearances to struggle with his mental health, and contracts a rare disease with... inconsistent symptoms that are difficult to verify. Now, of course, we know you had encephalitis. But you understand how convenient the illness can seem, especially since, as soon as your supposed crimes were revealed -- as soon as you were caught --" Chilton snapped his fingers. "You were cured. And now, you seem so very in control of yourself, by all appearances rational and sane.

"Now, you claim not to remember your crimes. Maybe you do not. One of my fields of expertise is in memory retrieval. I could lend much needed credibility to your defense -- but only if you work with me."

Will tried not to glare at him, dropping his gaze to his tie instead. Dr. Chilton was right, but Will didn't want him in his mind -- and, maybe, Will did not really care if he was executed.

"Oh, I do not mean to threaten you, Will," Dr. Chilton tried to reassure him. "I will be a witness in your trial to your mental state, and my conclusions will be based on my professional opinion. Consider that. I know better than you how difficult it is to win the court over with the unconsciousness defense."

Still, Will did not respond. Dr. Chilton's polite, patient veneer cracked somewhat, but he was still generally untroubled when he sighed softly and continued to speak to his silent patient. "You've been screaming in your sleep," Dr. Chilton said, as an offhand thought. Considering. "Have you been having nightmares, Will?"

Will stared at the plexiglass wall between them. He almost wanted to smile. *You have no idea.*

"You have a history of difficult sleep, do you not? I wonder what horrors manage to worm under the skin of a man such as yourself. Though, Alana has said that you are characterized by fear. Oh, yes, of course we speak about you. As professionals. We can hardly be expected not to."

Dr. Chilton paused, delighted, thrilled that Will's silence afforded him the opportunity to stick a needle in his specimen. "Unfortunate that we have such an incomplete picture of your psychiatry from the past year. Your first known kill was just before you started seeing Dr. Lecter -- as patient and therapist," he clarified. "It would be invaluable to have his perspective."

Will was being goaded to react. His silence was a game, now, and in some ways that made it easier to deny the snarl that coiled in the back of his throat, to let it ease and unwind. Dr. Chilton was just getting started. There were far worse things he could say than merely bringing up Dr. Lecter.

"Have you given the trial any thought?" Dr. Chilton asked. "Or are you in denial? I don't think you've considered that the trial does not merely affect you. If the FBI cannot guarantee that the blame falls on you entirely, who do you think they want to get the axe? Crawford? No, not when the public's eye can be slid elsewhere. Over Dr. Bloom, who has consulted with the FBI for years, to land on your last victim, Dr. Lecter."

Will tried to disengage.

"From what little Dr. Bloom and I know about your relationship with your previous psychiatrist, it seems… that Dr. Lecter was not entirely appropriate with you."

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Inevitably, Will wondered how Hannibal was coping with the trauma.

He had no doubt that Hannibal was handling it elegantly.

There was, deep behind the stalwart fortress of Hannibal's mind, a long-buried pain. Entombed in a mausoleum, guarded by gargoyles and ancient stone. Hannibal had rarely described the actual design of his mind palace, but Will had seen his sketches of Italian architecture and knew the space within Hannibal's mind was not gothic, delicate, reaching

impossibly towards the heavens, but Roman, sturdy, and gilded. Will had sensed the deeply-rooted pain at times, unable to discern if it was mourning or trauma or both. Will saw it in the way Hannibal's eyes slid out of focus when Will was covered in blood and come; felt it in the hunger with which he devoured Will's mouth when his control frayed; heard it in the stark absence of conversation about Hannibal's past and family.

"I grew up in an orphanage," Hannibal had said like dropping a dead weight. The confession was as absurd as Hannibal seated at an interstate diner, hands folded over a huge menu he disdained to look at.

Hannibal had perfected his self control in order to protect himself, but Will had spent enough time with him to pick up on the tells. No one became that obsessively manicured in their image without reason.

"It is impossible for me to be hurt in the way I was before", Hannibal had said, hand around Will's throat. *You have nothing to fear.*

No, Hannibal was not unexperienced in trauma and life-and-death situations. He would be academic in his emotional recovery of the trauma, speaking frankly with his psychiatrist, outlining his feelings and symptoms, and wandering too often into the abstract, as if being tortured by his mentally ill partner was a problem of philosophy. Hannibal would take time off work, but not too much; would speak with his friends just enough to not seem to be avoiding his feelings. He would plan an elegant memorial for Abigail in time, no body to bury, few people in attendance. Alana. Freddie Lounds. Eventually, Hannibal would shed the ashy skin of mourning and reclaim his life by composing on the harpsichord or a hosting an extravagant dinner party, emerging into the world gleaming and reinvigorated by his appreciation for life and beauty. Having faced death, Hannibal would rise from the cracked earth of the underworld.

Hannibal Lecter would survive.

Maybe that was why, when Will imagined their conversations, Hannibal was not as betrayed and hurt as anyone would expect. Will had wounded him, and Hannibal would mourn the loss of their relationship. But he would move on while Will rotted away. A living corpse.

He said he wouldn't abandon you -- a vile thought twisted through Will's mind. But there was no answer to that accusation. There was no way for Hannibal to hold true to his promise to see Will through this darkness. Maybe if they had never been lovers, his psychiatrist would help him now. Maybe in that world, Will could peel away the cloying tar from his skin and rebuild a home beneath his ribs. The winter might warm and expose the earth beneath, and Will would go digging for the bodies buried there, excavating and tilling the soil so that he was not just death.

"There will yet be a spring for us," Hannibal's voice emerged. *"For you, myself, and Abigail."*

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In the forest, in the dark, with frozen dirt sagging cold and cracked beneath his feet, Will stood before a colossal mirror. Somewhere behind him was a fire, whose light just managed to slip between the trees and catch the gilded frame. There was not enough light to catch an image of himself in the glass, but instead a suggestion of a human form staring back at him. *Don't look* . Will placed his hands on the mirror, staring for a moment at the thing on the other side.

He smashed his head on the glass.

Everything shattered. Beautiful. Shards sung as they rained down. Everything in the forest was a razor sharp edge, from the rustle of feathers to the flicker of firelight. Reality had such a fine skin, stretched so tight as to be transparent. A gossamer film shredded in an instant. Will looked at the space beyond the empty frame and saw a figure of tar crouched on concrete, musing over a puzzle of broken glass on the ground, trying to make the pieces fit. The nightmare jack-hammered fear into Will's brain but he would not wake up, and the monster moved the shards on the ground, it's distorted back shifting with sinuous muscles, bones pronounced; and Will must be dying the fear was so acute, and still the dream did not break into a roar of screams. The monster simply looked over its shoulder and stared at Will with the absence of eyes. It stood, impossibly tall for something so akin to a man, antlers reaching towards the heavens.

Don't look, Will begged of himself, even as the monster strode towards him, each movement vibrating through the black space. *Don't look,* he bargained, threatened, laughed. The monster took Will's skull in both clawed, massive hands, stroking his face with its inky thumbs. Up close, Will recognized his own skeletal face distorted under the black skin of the beast, a body like his but with every bone dislocated and stretched. His eyes were shut by its clawed thumbs, and then the monster pushed its nails into the soft socket, bursting his eyeballs with a white hot flame.

Then, Will was kneeling on top of Abigail's chest, thumbs deep in the hot wet holes where her eyes had been, pushing as deep as was possible.

Paralysis

Chapter Summary

> *Will tried to force himself awake, his mind flooded with fear. There was no escape from his mind, there never had been, had there? No relief from the thoughts and invasive knowledge and constant pressure of life in which Will was crushed. No relief save the bright knife of fear and the depraved minds he pulled on like a second skin. Nothing felt real like this nightmare, nothing. Will could not escape so he endured.*

> • • • • • • • • • •

> Will is frozen. He refuses to move.

Chapter Notes

> thanks for reading! say hi on tumblr

Mr. Graham was not a troublesome patient, but most weren't until the moment they were violent. And, like many, he was near mute, speaking to the orderlies only when necessary, and never to the staff doctors. The BSHCI kept several serial killers, but bringing in two in the same week had strained resources and raised tensions in the hospital. They were understaffed, and many of the orderlies had to work back to back shifts and sleep in the empty wing.

Though Mr. Graham was thus far cooperative, he was treated as the highest risk patient. Halls had to be cleared to escort him between rooms. He was not permitted contact with any other patients. He had to be monitored at all hours of the day and night. There were more detestable, revolting patients in the hospital, but Mr. Graham was a primary cause of the orderlies long shifts, and Dr. Chilton's frustration seeped down the chain of command.

Abuse of patients was both not tolerated and inevitable.

The procedure for showering for a high risk patient was the following: the patient stripped and placed his jumpsuit in the laundry, stepped into the open stall, was permitted five minutes of water and a bar of soap, and when finished would be handed a small towel. The towel was

not large enough to wrap around a neck. Then the patient would be given a fresh jumpsuit to change into. The entire time, the orderly would monitor the patient.

When he was done bathing, Mr. Graham shut off the water himself and turned expectantly for the towel, which was not placed, as it usually was, on the small bench outside the stall. "Turn around and put your hands on the wall," the orderly said.

Mr. Graham paused for only a moment before complying, turning perpendicularly to the orderly so he could see what was happening. The orderly stood, crossed the tile, and reached into the shower, turning the cold on all the way. He then returned to his seat to watch, and Mr. Graham stood and bore it, shivering violently and then, after minutes, not at all.

It was not altogether uncommon for the hospital to attract staff members who found satisfaction in controlling others and administering the rote debasements necessary for the hospital to function. But mostly, the abuse suffered by the patients was not doled out intentional by the hands of sadists in power -- the abuse of the hospital was written into the very architecture, and the staff were normal people not immune to its inherent violence. When patients were kept behind bars and ate with their hands and stank, it was inevitable that the staff thought of them as dogs. When the staff got used to restraining thrashing adults to four points and hearing disturbing provocations from child rapists and being vigilant for the next take down, it was no wonder they came to think of their patients as rabid.

And Mr. Graham was an unbroken mutt whose violence was caged, not tamed.

Among the staff of the maximum security wing, there was a pool going for which of their two new serial killers would 'get a physical' first -- attack another staff or patient. Most had their money on Hannah Reid, the Marionette Murderer. The double-catch of killers were opposites in every way: Mr. Graham quiet, cooperative, and seemingly rational; Ms. Reid chatty, difficult, and volatile. While Ms. Reid was obviously violent and insane, she also had little opportunity to harm with anything but her words, and was too physically weak to get the jump on anyone. Mr. Graham was limping but physically fit, and if he ever became violent it would be unpredictable.

There was no pool for which serial killer would first provoke an attack on themselves. Ms. Reid had already caused a suspension, and her conversations with the serial rapist in block B made patrolling that hall unbearable. It was simply a matter of when.

Between the two celebrity serial killers, all the hospital staff were on edge.

After four frozen showers, that orderly was rotated out of shower duty. Another would strap Mr. Graham too tightly to the gurney. And then there was the misunderstanding where he was strapped to four points and left in a different solitary room for three hours. "Sorry about that, Mr. Graham," one of his regulars said. “Bit of a miscommunication.”

Mr. Graham did not react to any of the provocations. There was, unobserved by most, a touch of satisfaction Mr. Graham took from the abuse. Almost none of the orderlies had eyes sharp enough to see it.

“Do you prefer a cold shower?”

The voice was quiet enough not to be picked up on the audio. Will stood facing the tile wall, water pouring down his back. He turned to look at the orderly sitting in the chair, briefly making eye contact -- which resulted in a bright grin. Will dropped his attention, ignoring the question. It was one of his main orderlies, a young, clean shaven white man with a quiet demeanor. He was not one of the ones who treated Will roughly. Brown, something. Normally unobtrusive and hardly noticed by those around him, Brown was now quietly glowing with excitement.

“I got Richie rotated out of shower duty,” Brown said through a smile. “Gave him a talking to. You don't have to worry about that anymore.”

Will kept him in the corner of his eyes, quickly soaping up in case Brown would stop his shower earlier and leave him to stink for two more days. It seemed like he was only looking at Will’s face.

“Unless you want him back. Or, you could just turn it cold yourself. No judgement here.”

Just the hawkish edge of his gaze.

Will was even tempted to do so. Punish himself. His fingers traced the red lines on his wrists that he had dug with his thumb nail. Quiet, unobtrusive punishment, to relieve the tension. Will squashed down the tremor as he thought of turning on the cold and raking his nails down his arm, letting the bottled pain breathe. Relief.

"Ask me," Hannibal had said through the phone.

"I shouldn’t. I want to, but -- god, this isn’t..."

"If you don’t ask, you won’t get what you need."

Will turned the knob all the way to cold and heard Brown’s delighted gasp. The water came down hard and freezing, battering and numbing his skin, washing the soap down the drain.

Breathless, Brown said, “Hands on the wall.”

Will did, head under the shower head. Ears ringing. Nearly drowning as the water sloshed over his face, eyes forced shut. His skin prickled with goosebumps, and in a minute his teeth were chattering. But he felt alive.

Brown just watched him, grinning.

• • • • • • • • • •

Will Graham woke like his consciousness had been dropped three stories into his body. A violent smack. He tried to move and recover from the blow, but he couldn't move -- four

point restraints. His brain dumped chemical fear into him like a toxic vat, and his fight response kicked into high gear. But Will could not even thrash against the restraints.

He was paralyzed.

Not bound by restraints at all, Will was lying prone on his mattress in his barren room. His mind was awake but his body was not. Sleep paralysis, Will realized, not that the knowledge improved the situation. He looked around the dark room, unable to turn his head. He was not seeing, truly, but his dream rendered the room in minute detail.

“Will,” someone said, as clear as any reality he had ever trusted.

“Will.”

“Will.”

“*Will*.”

Voices in passing that he didn't recognize. Jack’s voice. Alana’s voice. Abigail’s. Over and over again he heard his voice called.

“There's something wrong with you.”

“Why did you kill me?!”

“Please don't do this.”

And then, the screams.

Will forced his head to the side in a desperate bid to move, and just as violently it snapped back to its original position. Like he was possessed, a prone doll waiting to be toyed with. Something came down the hall towards his room with the steady *clip-clop* of hooves. The sound of each hoof fall was felt as a reverberation, slowly tolling his doom. *Clip-clop, clip-clop*. Amongst the swarm of voices, Hannibal’s cut through.

“Will. I am here, with you.”

A sob caught in Will’s chest. He could not respond or scream. The hooves stopped outside the door, and he could feel that presence there, out of sight, thick as tar and toxic.

The door flew off its hinges and slammed into the opposite wall with a wail and a crash, the sound vibrating in Will’s teeth. There was nothing on the other side of the open doorframe, nothing to see but it was there, Will could feel it step into the room, tall and crowned in antlers; could see the impressions of its hoofs sinking into the floor where ichor bloomed and bubbled; could feel it stalk towards his bed. The mattress sank under the weight of someone sitting on the edge.

An unseen hand touched Will’s forehead, smoothing back his hair.

Will tried to force himself awake, his mind flooded with fear. There was no escape from his mind, there never had been, had there? No relief from the thoughts and invasive knowledge and constant pressure of life in which Will was crushed. No relief save the bright knife of fear and the depraved minds he pulled on like a second skin. Nothing felt real like this nightmare, nothing. Will could not escape so he endured.

Phantom hands caressed his face, tracing the line of his jaw and lifting his chin. A mockery of affectionate touch. But there were claws, waiting -- Will felt the diamond tips of them trailing down his neck, cutting the first layer of skin, the air hot against the slight cuts. Hands moved over his shoulders, down his chest, felt underneath his uniform. They smoothed, cold and perfect like polished marble. Then, the fingers curled to press the points of nails against both pecs, and slowly, so slowly, pushed down. In. Cutting down into skin and fat and muscle, wriggling to find the notches between ribs. He breathed harshly, sweating, unable to even squirm as claws pressed between his ribs and cracked them from his sternum, puncturing his lungs and drowning him in blood.

“Shhh…” The voices hushed him, unseen fingers at his lips. They probed his mouth, tasting like soot and gasoline. Hands everywhere, touching his skin as if testing its elasticity, or looking for the right places to puncture him. He kept waiting for more cuts as his ribs cracked, expanded, but they just touched him, smoothing up and down his legs, squeezing joints. Exposed. Vulnerable.

“Will.”

“Will.”

Invisible fingers splayed through his toes, stretching the delicate bones. He felt claws pinch on either side of his kneecap, as if deciding whether or not to pop them off. And the wounds on his left thigh were traced, cool fingers against the curved arcs of healing flesh, nails slicing through the stitches to open the cleft of scar tissue.

Will wanted to scream. He wanted it to end. *Help me.*

A familiar breath tickled his ear, and a warm hand stroked over his forehead, smoothing the wrinkles of pain. The other claws did not stop their examination of him, but this touch Will knew. “Breathe, Will,” Hannibal said, unseen behind him. “You are safe.”

Liar, Will thought, as warmth blossomed in the knife wounds. His left leg was trembling violently.

“This is just a nightmare.”

I don’t want you here, Will replied desperately, as cold hands spread his mouth open, jaw stretched as far as it would go. *Please go, please* --

And just like that, as quickly as the thought reared it’s head, Hannibal was in his place on the mattress, and Will was holding open his jaw with black, slick hands.

• • • • • • • • • •

The FBI assigned Will a lawyer. He barely paid attention during their meeting besides gaining the basic information about his situation. It was bad. The trial was going to be less about whether or not Will was guilty, and more about whether or not Will was aware of what he did. He wasn't. Hard to prove. Alana was working with the lawyer on an unconsciousness defense.

Being in a room with another human being with so few restraints and barriers was novel. No glass wall, only the handcuffs restraining him to the table. And, blissfully, there was privacy -- Dr. Chilton couldn't watch or listen to this conversation. It was also distracting, being so near another person, lips and flickering expressions and the movement of his eyes, the rather put-on performance and quick, clipped words. Will detested the lawyer, Henderson, immediately.

“We need to talk about your relationship with Hannibal Lecter,” the lawyer prompted, again.

Instead of shooting him down like he had all the times before, Will just raised his brow.

“He’s going to be a key witness,” Henderson said, annoyed. “For both prosecution and defense. I don’t care that you don't want to talk about it, we have to.”

“What's there to talk about?”

“Hannibal Lecter was your psychiatrist.”

“Unofficially.”

“Unofficially, but yes. Dr. Lecter was the one guaranteeing your mental stability for Jack Crawford.”

“Dr. Lecter unofficially supported me in my consultation with the FBI.”

“We can work with the nebulous angle. That can be spun to our advantage, and Dr. Lecter’s. Not so much Crawford.”

“Jack’s not on trial.”

“Hmm.” He switched tracks abruptly. “Did you have a romantic relationship with Dr. Lecter?”

Will clenched his jaw. “Yes.”

“During or after he was unofficially your psychiatrist?”

“During. And after.”

Henderson tapped his pen on his notepad, then stopped. “Dr. Bloom has suggested to me that in his unofficial capacity as your psychiatrist, Dr. Lecter made questionable decisions regarding your mental health.”

“I was officially Dr. Bloom’s patient at that point,” Will pointed out. “And they made decisions together.”

“So you want to pass the buck to her?” Cooper asked. “If you ever want to see life beyond a cell, someone is going to have take the buck. Hannibal Lecter brought you and Abigail Hobbs to Minnesota against the wishes of Dr. Bloom. Do you know what that looks like?”

“What?”

“An unreliable witness and abuse of doctor-patient relationship.”

Will looked towards the door. “You're fired.”

• • • • • • • • • •

Kade Prurnell walked into the interview hall like someone coming to shoot a horse between the eyes. Will was the only patient in the large hall. It was an improvement to his conditions for good behavior, or maybe because Dr. Chilton wanted to see him in a 4x4 foot cage, or maybe because the orderlies didn't have time to strap him to four points for Prurnell’s visit. It was slightly more comfortable than the plexiglass room, but Will felt the confines of his imprisonment quite literally.

Kade Prurnell introduced herself as the FBI internal investigator and told Will what he already knew -- that the prosecution was going to paint him as an intelligent psychopath, and the FBI was trying to clean up this hot mess. Prurnell asked him to plead guilty.

Will considered it.

The idea of putting Hannibal through a trial and making him speak about what Will had done to him was almost too difficult to bear, as difficult to stomach as the idea of seeing Hannibal in that context for what would likely be the last time. It would be easier for everyone, including him, if he pleaded guilty. He would avoid execution.

Alana looked devastated by the idea.

“You can't plead guilty to something you don't remember,” she insisted, again.

“I can. Technically.”

She was furious. “If you plead guilty you will never leave this place. You don't deserve that!”

Will thought about never seeing one of his dogs again, never fishing, never again having privacy. “If I don't plead guilty, I’ll probably be executed.”

“I don't believe that the Will Graham standing in front of me is a killer. You were sick, and you were not taken care of by those you went to for support. We let you down -- Jack and I,

and Hannibal, yes."

Will flinched.

Alana pressed. "Hannibal was inappropriate with you and prevented you from getting adequate medical help. You both obfuscated symptoms--"

"Hannibal didn't deserve what I did to him--"

"I'm not saying that! No one deserves that. But neither is it right for you to throw away the rest of your life."

"Why not?" Will answered bitterly. "People are dead. Why shouldn't I pay a fraction of what I dealt?"

"You're far more empathetic with the killers you profile than you are with yourself. Would the Angel Maker have deserved execution or lifelong imprisonment? You're not sick anymore."

"I don't know, Alana," Will said, although his sense of judgement had always been strong and his answer was clear in his mind. "I can't stand the idea of making Hannibal testify. This… I just want this to be over."

"It is not *just* for you to spend the rest of your life in this hospital," Alana said, wrestling her emotions out of her voice. She was pure determination, desperate to not give up on him. "We need to take responsibility for how we failed to keep you and others safe."

Will smiled weakly. "Your faith in the system has always been admirable. It's also your greatest weakness as a psychiatrist."

"I have faith in you," Alana said, like pulling out a tooth.

"I wonder if Hannibal still does," Will replied, feeling the words cut through both of them.

• • • • • • • • • •

In his mind, Will and Hannibal stood in the snowy fields of his Wolf Trap farm, the sun hidden by clouds. Will wore no shoes, and blood froze to the skin from where it dripped down his left leg. It didn't hurt, though. It was too cold to hurt.

Hannibal considered the winter around them, his feelings caged behind a stony facade. "You are not surviving, Will."

"No."

"I want you to survive."

“There is no path ahead of me,” Will said, articulating each consonant, “upon which I can survive.” He looked around the white of the open fields and the hovering line of the woods, smiling. “Survival is permitted to those who can imagine a place in the world to occupy.

“The breadth of your imagination is cosmic,” Hannibal replied. “You are locking doors in your mind, and pretending they are dead ends.”

“You make it sound easy. To cut myself open and look at the poorly contained remains.”

The cold made Hannibal look somber, distant. He always dressed warmly, and kept his home and office well-heated. Now, in Will’s mind, there was a suggestion of a shudder, a memory perhaps, of one of the million catalogued micro-expressions Will’s obsessive mind could not help but contain. “Our base state is survival” Hannibal said, breath fogging in the air. “It is difficult to turn off the animal impulses that keep you clinging to life.”

“I’m not suicidal.”

Hannibal gave him an amused look. “Then you think you can sustain this purgatory? Continue to ignore the scratching at the door? It’s not like you to give up so easily.”

“I'm tired of fighting.”

Hannibal pursed his lips in a thin line. “That's understandable,” he said, disappointed.

“I don't know,” Will said, clenching his fists, “what the fuck you or Alana could possibly expect from me at this point.”

“That is false.”

Will stared down at his feet in the snow, at the dark dripping blood at the cuff of his pants and the sparse bone-like stalks of shrub protruding through the white.

“Why are we here, Will?” Hannibal asked. “Why not wading in the stream where you might organize your thoughts?”

“River is frozen,” he muttered.

“It's only winter in your mind. You create this internal landscape, barren and stagnant, to keep frozen your thoughts.”

“A straightforward metaphor. Why are you here?”

“You know that answer too.”

Will smiled, as brittle as the frozen stalks of grass beneath the snow. It hurt to hold it on his face, and he dropped it quickly, looking back at his little house and the barn beyond. “I already know everything I don't want to know.”

“I already gave you the answers.” Hannibal started walking, not towards the house but across the field towards the woods.

Will swallowed, heart wrenching as he watched Hannibal leave. He tried to follow, but his feet were frozen to the ground. *I need your help* he thought, but couldn't bring himself to say it. Hannibal's figure shrank to a dark silhouette against the maw of trees, indistinguishable as more than a shape; but he didn't disappear into the tree line, so that after a while of looking, it felt like something dark and amorphous was walking *back* towards Will, stalking through the snow.

He just had to ask.

Shards of Glass

Chapter Summary

Will wracked his brain for the memories of those days, and they were there, fucking every detail was recorded in his mind but accessing them was like pulling out teeth. There were barriers, sink pits, snares in the terrain of his mind. Will had an eidetic memory but he saw too much to process, and the noise was buried in his subconscious. He couldn't just pluck up memories and information, he had to focus and plant his feet against the tidal wave of information.

But it was all there.

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Some knowledge is inevitable. Will stops looking away.

Chapter Notes

writing in italics largely indicates thoughts, memories, and imaginings that come from Will's subconscious. sections entirely in italics are things Will is not conscious of, whether they happened or not. it's supposed to be difficult to verify what is real, because Will's mind is a mess. I hope it's not too confusing to read!

thank you so much for reading.

It was like this:

Every surface in Will’s mind was smothered in fabric, furniture covered, dust gathering in vacated rooms. His thoughts were blunted and absorbed, no sharp sounds of clarity. All the mirrors were draped over in mourning. Will felt sane and no longer suffered the fevers and confusion that had plagued him for what seemed like an eternity, but he was staunchly looking away from everything that happened, telling himself it was too painful to look at, and what was the point anyway?

I’m a killer, Will told himself, hands over his eyes.

But it crept up on him, slithering along the floor beneath his feet, blinking in the corners of his eyes -- the inconsistencies and questions and warnings he refused to examine. It tugged at

him, hissed in his ear. So Will was slow to realize, that besides the awful situation he was in, there was something very wrong in his mind.

Trauma was funny, that way.

When he paid attention to his body, it was screaming. He felt like there was a film of gasoline on his skin from the aftereffects of invasive touch, phantom hands pulling back the scabs of imagined wounds and exposing him; holding open maws in his skin for someone to come and touch and bury their hands in the surgical opening of his chest cavity. He was flayed, spread open and waiting for a deadly blow. Touches on the back of his neck, hands smothering his nose and mouth, the neck of a bottle trailing down his spine. Throughout the day, these thoughts came to him, not obsessive or feverish but slowly insistent. He was living with the muscle memory of wounds he never incurred.

Will lay on his back on his stained mattress. It was the beginning of his fifth week at the hospital, and he was still kept in the seclusion room. The silence ached around him.

He didn't want to think. But there was too much time, and nothing else to occupy himself with. He did not need to think about anything directly to feel the monstrous shapes -- the empty place where his understanding failed, the cold cut of fear, the place Hannibal had left in his absence that was now a wounded shadow. In the corners of his consciousness, he felt Hannibal move about his kitchen, slicing with a knife, running his hands under the tap, the twist of his wrist as he handled the skillet. Will felt, like raw tissue, Hannibal's heavy gaze on his skin. The man was too embedded in Will's mind for the quiet isolation of the room not to feel like a lost limb.

Will had led Hannibal into the dark recesses of his mind, and Hannibal had been hurt. That had always been Will's fear, like he was toxic and anything that came too close to the boneyard of his mind would be stained. That he was irreparably broken. Will had known it to be a partially irrational fear, until it was confirmed for him.

Behind his eyes, Will saw Hannibal slumped naked in the antler room, bloody arms held above his head. He was wrapped in barbed wire, most prominently around his arms, over a single thick knot holding his wrists together, and down to his shoulders. An antler display hook was mounted above the window, over which the rope was looped --

Holding Hannibal's bleeding arms up --

His grey-blonde hair matted with blood across his forehead --

The sway of brown locks of hair dangling from the web of barbed wire.

Details. Will knew them all and did not want to put them together to recreate the scene. But the scene was always there. And *where was Abigail's body?*

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“You look like a man coming to pay his respects,” Will said to Jack Crawford as he came to stand before Will’s cage.

Jack leveled Will with a look, brow raised. “You're not deceased, Will.”

“Still have a bone to pick with me, then.” Will smirked, viewing Jack through the bars.

Jack was uncomfortable, conflicted about Will and here to sort his feelings. Close the book. It was so painfully obvious to Will, and he was too tired to play along. “I wanted to remind myself who you were,” Jack said. “See if I could remember the man whose classroom I walked into.”

Will let the quiet hang between them longer than was strictly comfortable. “Well? What's the verdict?”

“I see him,” Jack answered. “I'm just beginning to wonder if I ever really knew you. I badly want to find another explanation besides everything the evidence is telling me.”

“I don't know if it's more or less damning to tell you that I'm not an intelligent psychopath,” Will said, all black humor. “But I know myself, Jack. Even with all of this…” Will shook his head. “I don't want this. I wasn't in control of myself.”

You weren't sick when Melissa Scurr and Cassie Boyle died, a voice whispered in his head. Not sick as far as he was aware, at least.

“I'm not convinced these murders could have been committed by someone unaware of his actions,” Jack said carefully.

“If I’m an intelligent psychopath, then why did I do so thoroughly botch my last kill, and nearly kill myself in the attempt?” Will snapped. “Credibility for my insanity plea?”

“We can't find a trace of Abigail.”

“Besides the blood and hair?”

Jack nodded. “And your defense wounds. What did you do with her body, Will?”

Will looked away. “I don’t know.”

“Abigail Hobbs helped her father hunt the girls he killed. Did she help you?”

“Is that the explanation that fits your version of events?”

“What’s your explanation?” Jack asked loudly. “I’d really love to hear it, Will.”

He didn’t have one. (Not one he was willing to admit.)

“It’s been nice to see you, Jack,” Will snarled. “Now please, fuck off.”

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Brown and Richie escorted Will from the interview hall, his hands cuffed behind his back and the plastic mask over his face. They walked one in front of him and one besides, down the empty halls of the hospital. Jack's useless words ran in Will's head like a dull throb, and more than anything he just wanted to be alone in his room again.

The three men turned a corner in the halls, and stopped in their tracks. "Shit," Richie said, looking down the hall where two orderlies were similarly escorting Hannah Reid towards the interview hall. Will froze in place and felt the hair on the back of his arms stand on end. Hannah's eyes snapped to his immediately, and she smiled like she was running into an old friend.

"What the hell is this?" Richie complained loudly, taking a step forward. "Get her out of here."

"We thought it was clear," the orderly down the hall said, putting an arm on Hannah Reid to stop her from walking forward.

"It's just a misunderstanding," Brown said, appeasing. "Just take her back down the hall and we'll pass the other way."

Hannah was delighted by this chance meeting. "Hi, Mr. Graham."

"Hands on the wall," Richie ordered Will, turning on his heel to glare at his patient.

But Will was staring at Hannah Reid. The Marionette Murderer, the woman who had dug into his psyche and left a trap of bloody wires. She looked much like he remembered her -- gaunt and feral, with a disturbing exuberance. Will stepped forward, ignoring the order.

"Stop walking, Graham--"

"Mr. Graham!"

"You said something to me," Will said to Hannah, over the calls from his orderlies. "You saw someone following me."

"Mr. Graham!" Richie bellowed. "If you don't stop I'm going to be forced to restrain you!"

Will's foots echoed on the tile, and Hannah's amusement blossomed in his chest like it was his own. He remembered their interview in excruciating detail, remembered too how convinced he had been that the Copycat Killer was stalking him. *"Imitation is the greatest form of flattery,"* Hannah had said.

Richie tackled Will into the wall and his head cracked, stars shooting behind his eyes. In a moment he was on the ground, pinned, as a chemical restraint was injected into his leg

through the fabric of the jumpsuit. “Oh, you’re no fun!” Hannah complained, but the world was tilting, blurring --

• • • • • • • • • •

The stag monster stalked through the snow towards Will, jet black against white, breath billowing from its snout.

See? Hannibal murmured sensually in his ear, turning Will’s face to look in the mirror.

Will looked at the mosaic of broken glass on the concrete, trying to sort the pieces into a comprehensible image.

“Mr. Graham?”

Slowly, Will came back to himself. He was strapped to four points on the gurney in his isolation room, and Matthew Brown was hovering over him. “Oh good, you’re back with us,” Brown said with a grin. “You were given a chemical restraint. In case that’s not obvious.”

Will sighed, furrowing his brows for a moment, groggy. Brown continued. “Richie’ll look for any excuse to mess with you, but… I think you know that.” He walked around the gurney like a hawk circling its prey. “You never disobey orders like that.”

“Am I to be kept restrained?” Will asked, sounding annoyed. Brown’s eyes flashed, taking in him in the restraints, and it was enough for a shiver to go down Will’s spine. This orderly wanted something from him.

“I just want to talk,” Brown said, not answering the question. “You can talk freely with me, you know,” he added earnestly.

Will glanced towards the camera in the corner of the room. “Not really.”

Brown practically bobbed on his feet. “Who do you think sets up the audio?” He licked his lips.

“It’s off then,” Will said lightly, disguising the cold that was settling in his stomach. His mouth twisted into something like a smile -- of course. He always attracted the abnormal ones. Brown was just watching him, fidgeting slightly with the hem of his shirt. Since suggesting that Will take a cold shower, Brown hadn't done anything inappropriate. “Take off my restraints,” Will said, testing the waters.

Brown bit his lip and nodded. There was an excitement coiling under his skin. He undid Will’s right hand and paused, smirking, before moving to the left. When his hands were free Will massaged his wrists.

“It’d be no good to get in trouble,” Brown said, his voice muffled by his grin, as he moved to Will’s feet.

“You’re the one breaking the rules.”

“No one’s gonna notice,” Brown replied, releasing Will’s feet. The straps slipped through their clasps. “Dr. Chilton isn’t that obsessive about the tapes. So, whenever you want to talk…”

Will pushed himself to sitting, watching Brown carefully. “Why would I talk to you?”

Brown smiled at him, and clasped his hands behind his back, as if restraining himself. He wanted something -- Will’s attention. Maybe more. “You look like you could use a friend,” Brown said. “I could be a friend, to you.”

Will climbed down from the gurney and stood, facing the orderly. He narrowed his eyes, and affected a calculating look, as if he were in complete control of this situation, when in fact he was far from it. Richie might have been cruel, but this was far more dangerous. “I’ll consider it,” Will said levely. “Is Dr. Chilton considering moving me to a proper cell?”

“Mmm. I think so. Do you want that?”

Will nodded.

“Consider it done.” Brown looked like he wanted to say something more.

“What’s on your mind, Matthew?” Will asked, forcing his voice casual.

Brown glanced at Will’s hands. “Your wrists. You hurt yourself.”

Will just raised his eyebrows.

“Do you like punishment, Mr. Graham?”

Will could feel Brown’s excitement, and made his own affect more disinterested. “What, are you a sadist?”

“Oh no, Mr. Graham. I wouldn’t hurt a fly,” Brown lied, blatantly. “I just think it’s interesting. Serial killers aren’t usually masochists.” There was reverence in his voice.

“I think you should leave, Matthew,” Will said, trying to sound kind.

“I won’t tell anyone, Mr. Graham. Your secrets are safe with me.”

“Time will tell if you’re trustworthy,” Will said, calm and collected even as his mind wanted to shut down. “That’s all for now.”

Matthew Brown gave a nod of understanding, and left Will’s room with the gurney.

Time eked by. Will sat on the edge of his bed, hunched over his knees. And, finally, he focused.

He needed help, he wasn't too proud to admit that to himself at least. This existence was unbearable, and there was something very wrong. All at once he knew that he was ignoring what was happening in his mind, like he had realized it over and over in the past five weeks but had buried that knowledge, denied it. *You're a monster. You killed all those people. The pieces don't fit together.*

So, taking a deep, ragged breath, Will began to sort through the pieces.

Cassie Boyle was the Copycat's first victim. Closing his eyes, Will was suddenly at the scene -- looking down at her naked body impaled on an a stolen trophy elk's head, her chest sewn up and her lungs removed.

"He wanted her to be found this way," Will heard himself saying in memory. *"It's the homicidal equivalent of fecal smearing. It's petulant. I almost feel like he's mocking her. Or he's mocking us."*

"Our cannibal loves women," Will had argued, seeing in stark relief the difference between Hobbs and this mockery. *"He doesn't want to destroy them. He wants to consume them. Keep some part of them inside. This girl's killer thought she was a pig."*

"You think this is a copy cat?" Jack had said.

"Field Kabuki," Will said to himself again. This kill had given him everything he needed to find Hobbs. "Practically gift-wrapped."

Pig pig pig pig pig.

"An intelligent psychopath, particularly a sadist, is hard to catch," Will had said. *"There's no traceable motive. There'll be no patterns. He may never kill like this again."*

That had been his initial assessment. Will could imagine himself finding a girl to match the ones who were missing, and just *trying it out* to understand their cannibal. Get in his head. Oh, he had gotten inside Hobb's head. But Will could not think of people as swine. He understood them too well. And Will had not been sick, disoriented, or losing time when Cassie Boyle was killed.

Will wracked his brain for the memories of those days, and they were there, fucking every detail was recorded in his mind but accessing them was like pulling out teeth. There were barriers, sink pits, snares in the terrain of his mind. Will had an eidetic memory but he saw too much to process, and the noise was buried in his subconscious. He couldn't just pluck up memories and information, he had to focus and plant his feet against the tidal wave of information.

But it was all there.

The copycat killer had called to warn Garrett Jacob Hobbs that the FBI was on his trail. Will thought and thought, but he did not remember doing that. There hadn't been the opportunity to do so. And why would he?

To see what would happen.

Will pressed his fingers against his eyes, trying to focus.

"You didn't kill Cassie Boyle?" Hannibal asked, curious.

Will looked up. They were sitting in Hannibal's office, with Cassie's mounted body taking the place of the chaise lounge. He scrubbed his hand over his face, sighing heavily. "No." His voice was timid. Will clenched his teeth together, feeling the beginnings of panic like broken glass rubbing together in his hands. "I have no memory of doing so, no memory of confusion or lost time, and I don't fit the profile."

Hannibal tilted his head, his face painted with shadows. "A deduction based on your profile and your memories. We know that you started walking in your sleep shortly after."

"So in my sleep I drove for miles, stole an elk head, murdered her and kept her lungs --" Will shook his head. "It doesn't fit."

"We may be dealing with a new kind of psychological break," Hannibal reasoned. "There is a killer in your mind that you are not aware of."

Will shivered, rubbing his arms through his shirt. The way Hannibal said that, the sudden cold in the room, made Will feel like the floor was about to disappear out from under his feet. "I've let killers in my head before," Will said. "They've never stayed so long."

"Does Hobbs remain in your subconscious?"

Will shook his head, his words coming out in a slow drawl. "No. I finished what he started."

"Did you see what he tried to show you?" Hannibal inclined his head, and the whites of his eyes glowed in the shadow under his brow. "When you slit Abigail's throat?"

God, those eyes. Will missed him -- the way he looked at Will, the weight of his gaze on his skin, that was somehow as intense as his touch. The way Hannibal wanted to see all of him and refused to close his eyes to the horror in Will's mind. Hannibal had been there with him through everything, from the very beginning of this.

"I miss you," Will said, all aching honesty. "I won't allow myself to imagine you giving me comfort. I won't let myself. But god, I want it." He covered his face briefly. "I wish I could see you again. I feel like if I saw you again, this would all make sense."

There was a flutter of soft, wet noises throughout the room. Will looked up, and saw eyes blinking open from the floor, the lines of Hannibal's windowpane suit, the wrinkles of his face, and the feathered stag behind him. Fear was an acrid taste in the back of his throat.

“Focus, Will,” Hannibal said in his gently commanding voice. “Sometimes we must get lost in the woods in order to find ourselves. When the way is dark and forbidding, the path we make for ourselves may be treacherous.”

Will knew these words, Hannibal had said them to him, when --? The eyes just multiplied and Will’s heart was racing against his skin, watching the stag’s antlers grow like cracks in glass.

“Know that when the beasts of your fear rear their heads, you are close to the truth.”

Shaking, Will held to the arms of the chair and made himself stay in this waking nightmare, even as his mind tried to tug the imagined scene out of shape. “You were with me the night the copycat first struck in Baltimore.” The words tumbled out of his mouth, his breathing coming in sharp. “I couldn’t have, I couldn’t. You’re my alibi, you’re --” Eyes began to open on the backs of his hands, bloody little wounds that swiveled to stare up at him. Blue eyes. Abigail’s eyes.

“It is just fear,” Hannibal said. “Stay with me, Will. You are safe.”

Sweating, Will rocked back and forth, in the imagined space of Hannibal Lecter’s office and the edge of his bed in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. “He framed me. He -- the copycat.” His breathing was short and shallow. “But what I did to you -- He couldn’t have framed that?”

“Breathe, Will.”

His focus was unravelling. Everything disappeared into eyes, threads, bright sinew. “Why can’t I think about this?” Will asked as his mind began to shut down. “Am I still sick?”

But there was no answer. He was back in the solitary room, trying to fend off a panic attack while his mind filled with static.

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Will was beautiful like this. He hung with his wrists above his head, barely standing on trembling legs, completely naked. His back was reddened with welts, from his trapezius and the tender sides of his ribs, to the swell of his buttox and strong thighs. There would be some bruising, but for now the crop’s welts were hot and freshly pink. He had endured so much, and so beautifully -- his skin glowing with a fine sheen of sweat, his curls slick against his forehead.

“I wish you could see how beautiful you are right now,” Hannibal said, cupping Will’s cheek. His stubble felt rough under his palm, and the trembling way Will leaned into the touch was intoxicating. “Nearly broken, hanging on by the merest thread.” Hannibal’s words ghosted over his face, smiling slight but true. His Will had taken so much pain at Hannibal’s direction, and Will had craved it. Needed it.

Though it was willingly given, power over this man was not easily won.

"Can you hear me, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will didn't respond. His eyes were glassy and only half-open, swollen lips parted and cheeks pinched with color from the exertion of taking the blows.

"I think you can, all the same. Like my voice is coming to you from somewhere deep inside you. Like I am in your head." Hannibal stepped closer, resting their foreheads together, the smell of sweat and scalp and blood filling his mouth. "Were you truly unable to stop, or did you wish to be pushed too far?" Hannibal mused aloud, swaying with Will, and smirking. "I could ask the same of myself."

Will was entirely too tempting. There were so many things that Hannibal could do to him; anything he cared to, really. But he could not have his cake and eat it too. He settled, then, for kissing Will briefly on his slack mouth.

"Nod if you can hear me," Hannibal instructed.

Will obeyed, bobbing his head from where it hung between his shoulders. Hannibal hummed in approval. "Very good, Will. I believe you've entered something of a dissociative state. You are likely highly suggestible now." Will swayed, and Hannibal placed his hands on his waist to catch him should his legs give out again. Hannibal's voice was a low murmur against his brow. "I would apologize for pushing you this far, but I do not wish to lie. Right now, we can be honest with each other, and so we must. Are you listening, Will?"

The younger man nodded again, eyes nearly closed.

"Good," Hannibal said. "I will attempt to rouse you from this state. I am going to count back from ten, and then tell you to awaken. When I do, you will come back to yourself -- your body and awareness -- and you will not remember this conversation. Do you understand?"

Will nodded.

"But first…" Hannibal held Will close, feeling the warmth of blood raised beneath the sweaty skin of his back. "Oh, my beloved. In the darkness of your mind, you know as well as I do that you are a killer. You may fight it tooth and nail, may deny and hide from it, but someday you will emerge resplendent in your own power." Hannibal stroked lightly through his hair. "I wonder how you would kill. With rope and razor wire and the blade of a knife. With your hands. Messily. The fantasies you subject yourself to -- don't you really want to feel what it's like to wield that power? Didn't it feel good, to hurt someone who deserved it?"

Will whined against him. "Shh, shhh," Hannibal soothed, cradling Will's head. "It hurts to deny it. You'd rather hurt yourself than accept it, I know. But I also know that you hunger for it."

"You killed Garret Jacob Hobbs," Hannibal murmured to his beloved "Was that taste really enough?"

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There was not a sign, or clue, or grand backdrop to Will's realization. The answers were waiting in his mind, and all he had to do was bypass his denial and look.

Will stood in the hospital bathroom before the mirror, washing his hands, and was granted more privacy than usual since Brown was escorting him. Will pushed up his sleeves to scrub himself clean, like there was a toxic spill across his skin, cloying and gritty and unseen. The welts on each wrist were small bust sensitive, a short line over the ulnar artery dug with his thumb. Taking a deep breath, Will gripped the edges of the sink and looked at himself in the mirror.

His hair was growing long and curling beneath his ears, a shaggy mess. His stubble was grown in, and there were deep-set creases to his brow; his eyes dark and flat; his face thin from lost weight. Will barely recognized himself, but he did recognize a man who had not only given up, but who was still scared. And it was pathetic.

Will closed his eyes. *Focus*. He saw the mirror and his reflection behind closed eyes, and perched behind his tongue was a bile so corrosive it would burn him up from the inside. The mirror cracked into shards, and they chipped away from his face, revealing black emptiness beyond; and beyond it Will saw the forest. Bodies hung from trees by one foot, and small disks of glass burned between the roots, the darkness between the thin trees vibrating. The mirror continued to crack, falling away. On the dirt beneath him was a shattered circle of glass --

You were my alibi. Why didn't you say anything?

But it wasn't that the pieces didn't fit --

"It's possible that I didn't need to kill him, Will. I could have tried to subdue him. But I thought he had killed you, so I took the stag statue and crushed his skull."

Will had seen the way the pieces fit, had looked at that image, and smashed it over and over again. He couldn't know it. He couldn't bear to see it.

"You're… not a mirror. Not mine."

"No? Then I will need to break you in two to show you yourself."

It was just a matter of looking at the pieces in a different light.

"Even evil must be mesmerized by an image of itself."

The broken shards of glass slid together, catching the firelight, until each piece found its home. How fucking long had Will known and just refused to see? *Oh my god. Oh my god.*

What is wrong with me? Will's eyes snapped open, and his knuckles were white against the edge of the sink. If he wasn't the Copycat Killer --

Will bent over the sink and heaved, stomach acid and wet chunks of food sliding up and out of his throat. All of a sudden he was shaking and his heart was pounding so loud in his ears that he couldn't hear, he couldn't breathe. In the mirror, the tar-skinned wendigo stared at Will, but it wasn't his own skeletal features that were distorted in the monster. They were Hannibal's.

"What do you see in the mirror?"

"Something I wish to polish to perfection."

The Devil That You Know

Chapter Summary

Will knows.

Chapter Notes

for some reason it's been more difficult to write these chapters, but I hope they're coming out well and that you enjoy them! your encouragement seriously means all the world to me. also, ps, I'm going to hell.

cw: fantasies of non-con, somnophilia, and light victim-blame language.

Will and Alana sat across from each other in the private interview room, and what she saw in her patient's face compelled her to reach across the shackles and place her hands on Will's. He shuddered at the contact, the only kind touch he had received in over a month. "Will," she said, voice laden with sympathy. "You look awful."

"That would be the panic attacks." Will's mouth twisted in a wry smile, and the expression seemed to physically pain him. He was gaunt and faintly trembling, and his eyes were bloodshot over dark, swollen bags.

"What happened?" Alana asked, alarmed.

Will sometimes forgot that he wasn't as transparent to other people as they were to him. They telegraphed their thoughts and feelings with every movement, and now Will tried to steady himself and keep from collapsing under the weight of abject horror, because he needed Alana to believe him. Will squeezed her fingers and took a deep breath. "I need your help," he said slowly, hoping that each word could carry its meaning home. "I need you to listen to me. Can you do that? Please?"

Alana's eyes were wide and concerned, but still sympathetic. She squeezed his hands back, the handcuffs and chain jangling slightly. "Tell me what's happening."

His tongue worked nervously over teeth. "I didn't kill any of them, Alana." Will met her eyes, even though it was difficult to see her shock, disbelief, and the way she quickly withdrew to analyze him. "The real Copycat Killer framed me."

For a moment, she was silent. "Will --"

“Just --” His hands tightened around hers. “Just. Let me say this. I have an alibi for Maxine Higgens’ death. I didn't remember it because my memories are scrambled. But I was with Hannibal that night. He was… inappropriate with me. He drugged me. He told me to cut myself. When I tried to break up with him, he refused to let me go.”

“Wait. What are you saying?”

Will leaned forward. “Hannibal Lecter is the Copycat Killer.” The words were acid in his mouth, tumbling forth in an inelegant confession. “He manipulated me and my illness to frame me. He’s a talented surgeon and psychiatrist, a sadist. He fits the profile.”

Alana withdrew her hands. “Are your symptoms returning?”

“I'm not sick.”

“You look feverish, and this is delusional thinking.”

“Feel my forehead,” Will insisted. “I'm not sick. I'm fucking terrified.”

Alana hesitated. She leaned forward and placed the back of her hand on his forehead, brushing some of the curls away. “I'm thinking clearly for the first time in months,” Will said as she withdrew her hand. “I don't remember committing the murders because *I didn't kill anyone.* ”

Alana looked at him sadly. “You attempted to kill Hannibal.”

“Did I?” Will grit his teeth, holding back bile and a sob. “I tied him up. Hurt him. None of his wounds were fatal.”

“He nearly bled out trying to save you.” Alana’s voice grew dark, trying to master her anger and fear.

“Only because when I woke up, I was so horrified by what it *l ooked like* I was doing that I nearly killed myself.” His words had a manic edge to them. “He didn't want me to die. By making himself my victim, there was no way I wouldn't believe I was the Copycat.”

“So Hannibal manipulated you into torturing him?” Alana accused with a flash of frustrated anger. “Is it easier to tell yourself this is Hannibal’s fault than to accept what you've done?”

Will clenched his fists until the nails dig into his palm. His throat ached with the force of his panic held at bay. *You think this is easy?* “Believe me, Alana. It's far easier to delude myself into believing I'm a killer than to accept what he did to me.” He tried to keep himself composed but the horror was clawing at him. He took in a deep breath and nearly sobbed, grinding his teeth. “To accept that I was sleeping with an intelligent psychopath for months and didn't see it.” He grabbed his hair. “Fuck! Alana I fucking loved him and tried to trust him, and he -- I was such a *fucking idiot* .”

“I think you're looking for a way to cope in an extremely difficult situation.”

“This is *coping*?”

“What you're saying doesn't make any sense.” She spoke slowly, trying to calm him. “If Hannibal is your alibi for the Higgens murder, then he can't be the killer either.”

“Unless he drugged me and left in the night. I know it sounds paranoid,” Will added quickly, “But he regularly gave me something to help me sleep. I don't know what it was. Ask him about that night. Even if I couldn't remember the alibi, he must have. Why wouldn't he bring that up in my defense?”

“I don't know, Will. But I can't encourage this kind of thinking.”

The structure holding Will together began to crumble. Why would Alana believe him when he had only just started to believe himself? And, god, he was angry. “You suspected that Hannibal was being inappropriate with me,” Will said, quietly venomous. “But now that I'm admitting it, you won't believe me?”

“It's a far cry from inappropriate behavior to murder.” She leaned back in her chair, processing and trying to stay ahead of whatever she thought this was. “We can talk about your relationship, and anything inappropriate Hannibal did during that time. You said that he encouraged you to self harm?”

Will leaned his head in his hands, covering a flush of shame. “I was self destructive,” he explained in a low voice. “He encouraged me to think of it as a release. The lesser of two evils. If I only harmed myself when he gave me permission…” Will shook his head, and let Alana see the conflict on his face. “He made it seem reasonable, and I wanted to hurt myself. Win-win. Then, one time, I cut myself without his permission. So he… punished me.”

“Will,” Alana said gently. “Did Hannibal ever hurt you?”

Will laughed bitterly and rubbed his face, *god*, it had come to this, hadn’t it?

“You can tell me,” Alana encouraged.

“And you’ll believe me, if it doesn’t sound too delusional?” Will held up his hand to keep her from replying, shaking his head at himself. “I know, I know. Okay.” He took a deep breath. Fuck. It was also perfectly manipulated. “Hannibal never raised his hand against me outside of what can be construed as a BDSM context.” Will didn’t look at her reaction. He could practically feel it across the table. But besides the quiet shock and readjustment, Will could also feel her slow-cooking anger.

“I think I understand,” she said.

“I don’t know when I lost the ability to consent,” Will said. “I have lost the ability to understand our relationship in coherent terms like ‘healthy’ or ‘abusive’.”

“He was your psychiatrist.” Alana definitely sounded angry now.

“The nebulous power imbalance of our relationship is trivial compared to everything else he did to me. You don’t believe me now, but you will.” Will grimaced at Alana. “Someone in that room killed Abigail Hobbs. If it wasn’t me, then it was Hannibal.”

Alana looked away, a vein popping in her jaw and her eyes damp. “You need help sorting between what is real, and what your mind is telling you in order to protect yourself. Trauma makes it difficult to remember what really happened, because the traumatic incident exceeded your capacity to understand. Hannibal may have hurt you, badly, but that does not necessarily mean he is the engineer of all of your trauma.”

“Doubt is poisonous. Once it gets inside, it’s difficult to eradicate. Maybe you should talk to Jack, because the evidence tells him that the Copycat couldn’t have been unaware of his actions. Too much premeditation. You *know* me, Alana. How well can you really say that you know Hannibal Lecter?”

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“Such disparaging remarks about me,” Hannibal said, once Will was alone again in the solitary room.

“You're a murderer,” Will replied in his own mind. “I don't need to make excuses for your inappropriate behavior.”

Hannibal tut-tutted. “I imagine it’s easier to cope with your revelation if you paint me as a villain in every aspect of our relationship.”

“You framed me for murder and messed with my head,” Will snapped. “Like a child cutting open a cat to see how it works.”

“With considerable more care, I assure you.”

Will grabbed his hair, bending over the edge of the bed. “Shut up. Shut up. Don't say a word.”

There was a brief interlude of quiet, and then Will was just alone. He lay on his stomach on the bare mattress and hid his angry tears. “I don't remember what you did to me. But I will.” He could feel the repressed memories like damaged film, burned out and inaccessible, physical wounds in his body where something had been taken out, and something left under the skin. Anger boiled in his stomach, but there was nowhere for it to go. No release, as he refused to even scream into the mattress, his pride making him cling to the last remnants of self control he had. He would not let Chilton see him cry or scream. The anger exhausted him. He didn't even know how thoroughly Hannibal had violated his mind and body because he couldn't remember it. But he could imagine it.

How he might have been laid out on the bed, drugged into deep unconsciousness so many nights sleeping next to a serial killer. The bedroom was burned into his mind, what was once a soothing place now haunted with disturbing reverberations -- elegant lines of blue and black, all muted elegance save for the ostentatious golden glow of the gilded mirror frame, leaning to face the bed. The cognitive dissonance between the beauty of the room and the monstrous things that had occurred there was an aching fissure, irreconcilable. How Hannibal

would watch him sweat and shake with feverish nightmares, eyes devoid of emotion so they were more like holes in his head. The way Hannibal would cock his head while contemplating from a curious distance, languid and predatory. He could imagine Hannibal drinking his full of looking at Will, unaware and pliant beneath dark sheets, before he ever touched him, pulling back the covers to see every inch of trembling flesh Hannibal claimed as his own. His play thing.

Will would be splayed on his stomach, and Hannibal might have sat between his legs, looming above him and smug with the knowledge that he could easily end Will's life here and now; could, in fact, do anything he wanted. Hannibal touched the back of Will's neck, feeling the muscles of his nape where his hair curled dark and unkempt; then, two fingers slid down Will's bare spine, coming away damp from the sleep-fever sweat. Hannibal admired the marks left on Will -- bruises from bites and welts from the lash, touching each in turn. Wounds he had placed there. His marks.

He smoothed his hands down Will's sides, over his hips and to his thighs, and when that didn't wake him, he dragged his knuckles down Will's ribs. Bone against bone. Will groaned in his sleep, but still didn't wake. Hannibal smiled, a gleam of teeth in the dim dark.

Will watched the scene play out from a floating viewpoint, feeling cold and repulsed and intoxicated in turn. For months Hannibal had Will in the palm of his hands, a fragile puppet to bend and maneuver into pleasing, violent shapes.

"Do you think me so despicable as to use you for my own pleasure in this way?" Hannibal asked the room, even as he gripped Will's thighs and spread them wide to expose his ass and balls, long legs between which Hannibal kneeled. "Violating you in your sleep?"

Will grit his teeth as he watched his own body vulnerable beneath the hands of his monster. Hannibal grasped his ass firmly and spread him, making Will whimper pathetically in his sleep. Hannibal examined him, trailing his hands over smooth muscle and lightly haired skin. "I don't know what you did to me," Will replied.

"Does this excite you, Will?" Hannibal asked, stroking his thumbs up and down the cleft of Will's ass, spreading the cheeks as he did. It was lewd and awful, and Will couldn't stop himself from thinking about it.

"See, you go and say things like that…"

"This is your fantasy," Hannibal countered, practically purring, thumbs pushing deep into pliant muscle. He brought his thumb to his red lips and sucked, coating the digit in saliva, and Will couldn't tell if he shivered from fear or something far more terrible.

"You'd be angry if you heard what I said to Alana," Will said, sneering. "Accusing you of abuse and violating boundaries. When meanwhile, you mutilated and murdered people."

"Not all violence is considered equal."

Will watched with horrified fascination as Hannibal spread his ass and dragged the wet pad of his thumb over his entrance, gentle and methodical. "Rape isn't part of your design," Will

said, chest constricting with shame. “Not with your murder victims.”

“Do you consider yourself a victim of mine?” Hannibal asked, curiously, opening him up slowly, indulgently, with firm strokes. Up and down, around, waiting until the skin was wet before pointing his thumb and pressing into the ring of muscle. “Does it terrify you to think of me getting inside you without your knowledge?”

“You did.”

Hannibal slipped his thumb inside yielding flesh, breathing through a smile of satisfaction. “Oh, Will. But you let me inside. Look at you -- opening up so easily to me.” God, this was fucked up. Will could look away, he could not imagine being teased open and helpless, softly groaning in his sleep.

“This is… beneath you,” Will said, but it sounded like a plea. Hannibal wouldn’t do this to him -- but before, he could never have imagined that Hannibal would frame him and let him be institutionalized. “You said you would protect me,” Will hissed, pressing his angry tears into the mattress, nearly smothering himself; but in his mind, Hannibal just kept fucking him open with his thumb.

“You wanted this,” Hannibal murmured, placing a kiss on Will’s shoulder. “You asked me for it -- to cut you open and wreck you.” He set his teeth on Will’s back, and Will could feel that, the familiar pressure of sharp teeth and a crooked canine, making his skin sing with the memory of claiming bites.

“Can you cut out that victim-blaming shit?” Will shook his head and screwed up his eyes tight, trying to understand why his mind was doing this to him.

“You have a tremendous amount to process.” Hannibal slid his thumb deep, letting out a satisfied breath. “I can feel your heart beating around me. Oh, Will -- it’s as if you were meant to contain me.”

Will forced his face against the hospital mattress, needing to stimulate to sooth the panicky disgust boiling inside at his own damn fantasy. Of course, the victim-blaming was his own, internalized, and the irony of that was bitterly amusing. It was so much easier to think of this than to even approach the memories of love-making (god, no, not love -- never); easier than remembering the way he begged to be tied up and hurt and violated, desires that revolted him anew. His desires were too tangled with violence and the murky areas of memory, and shame was nearly as devastating as the sense of betrayal. “You wouldn’t do this to me,” Will said weakly, watching Hannibal stretch him knuckle-deep, fingers slick with spit and lube to make the way easy and not disturb him from his sleep. The only sounds in the room were Will’s deep breathing, disturbed occasionally, and the wet slip of fingers moving in and out of his body. “Not unless I asked for it. Though, what do I know? Nothing. I didn’t see you.”

Hannibal stilled. He removed his fingers from inside the sleeping form below him and sat back on his heels. “You paint a contradictory image with which to better understand the truth,” Hannibal said, slicking up his cock with lube clinically. He placed his palms on the small of Will’s back, pushing him further down into the bed, and began to rub himself back and forth across the cleft of Will’s ass, and -- oh -- there was a spark of heat at that idea. “The

idea of me sliding into you," Hannibal voiced aloud, lining up his cock and bumping it against Will's hole. "Gently encouraging you to open up to me, that with enough care and attention your flesh would have no option but to yield to me. I would be so careful and slow, slipping in inevitably."

And he did, almost unobtrusively popping the head of his cock inside Will. "Oh, fuck." Will bit at the mattress but could find no purchase, as blood moved beneath his skin like he had just regained a missing pint. He could imagine exactly how it would feel, holding just the tip inside himself like a knife waiting to cut.

"Shhh, shhh," Hannibal murmured in his ear. "That's it. Ease into it. Don't be ashamed of thinking of this -- your mind is a dangerous complexity, and denial is beneath you."

"Stop," Will said. Hannibal didn't. He slid his cock deeper, and Will trembled and sweated in his sleep, making muffled noises against the pillow, caught between a nightmare and the unconscious violation. "Get out of my head!" Will shouted, as Hannibal groaned and slid in -- and Will's anger and fear cracked his skin open, and he grabbed the edges of the fantasy and tore it inside out --

"Oh, Will, yes… hush, it's alright."

Now Will was on top of Hannibal, grabbing his hair with both hands and smashing his face into the floor, *crunch*, and again, and again, until he felt the bones break and it still wasn't enough. He forced Hannibal's legs apart and took his own cock in an angry grip, forcing himself inside Hannibal, who cried out weakly with a gurgle of blood and broken teeth. "Get the fuck out of my head you fucking psychopath!" Will screamed, smashing his head down again for good measure and fucking into his ass, violently snapping his hips and screaming with pent up rage; there was a knife in his hands suddenly and he stabbed into the meatiest part of Hannibal's back, leaving the blade buried deep and using the handle for leverage. "I hate you, I hate you," Will panted over and over, thrusting in and out of Hannibal's tight, dying body. "I'm going to kill you. Oh my god. I want to kill you." With a snarl he ripped out the knife and plunged it in again, a cut for every thrust.

Will jerked himself upright from the bed, looking wide-eyes at the isolation room around him, shaking with anger. He sat up and paced the room, grabbing his hair with both hands like it might chase the taste of blood and fear from his mouth. *This isn't me,* he thought, pacing until his feet were sore. *I'm not a killer. I'm not a rapist. I never asked for this.* He repeated the mantra in his head until it was all he heard.

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"Good morning, Mr. Graham!" Matthew Brown's voice was chipper over the intercom into the solitary room, even though it was early. Will groaned and sat up from the bed, where he hadn't really slept so much as played hide-and-seek with his own mind. "I've got good news.

We're going to be moving you to a proper cell today. You can have your breakfast there. I'm going to come in to escort you now."

Will walked over to the door and stood with his back to it, and his hands behind his back, ready for the handcuffs. He heard Brown unlock the door and it creak open, then the orderly was behind him locking the handcuffs in place. "Isn't that good news?" Brown asked, giving Will a smile when he turned around. Unable to come close to returning the smile, Will simply nodded his head.

"You're going to be in Block B with the other violent offenders," Brown said as he escorted Will down the halls. "It's not all bad, just don't let Miggs get to you." Brown explained the protocols to Will as they walked, and Will wondered if the young man would be as enamored with him if he knew Will wasn't the serial killer everyone thought he was.

"Here we are," Brown said as the security guard buzzed open the gate to Block B. The hall was dark and windowless, with only old halogens lighting the way, a stark contrast to Will's brightly illuminated grey solitary room. About half of the cells were occupied, and Will paused in front of one, staring at the small shape sitting in the corner of the bed. Brown didn't hurry Will along.

Hannah Reid looked up from her arms, blankly assessing Will before smiling. She was disappearing into her jumpsuit, and looked even more starved than when he had interviewed her. "Hi, Mr. Graham," she said in a gravelly voice, which barely traveled to him. "Welcome to the block."

Will took a step closer to the bars, and Brown shifted uncomfortably behind him. Will glanced over his shoulder at the orderly. "You're having trouble feeding her," he said quietly.

Brown shrugged, glanced back toward the entrance to the hall, and then up to the camera above. "The nutritionists we bring in keep quitting, so we're doing some, uh, regimens."

Forced feeding. Will nodded. "I might be able to help." He stepped away from the bars and kept walking down the hall, intentionally stepping close to Brown so he could whisper. "I want to talk to her."

Brown nodded with a grin. "Ah, here we are, right next to Gideon." He showed off Will's cell with a gesture of his hand, and then unlocked the door, holding it open. Will stepped into his new home and allowed Brown to take of the handcuffs. "Be back with breakfast soon, Mr. Graham."

Will sat on the cot of his new cell, taking inventory of the old brick walls, the barred door, toilet, sink, and little mirror, all so poorly lit by the light above the bed that it was a miracle the cameras could see what was happening inside. The fact that his surrounding were as filthy and depressing as Will felt was a small comfort.

After breakfast, Dr. Chilton took a chair outside Will's cell. "How are you finding your new accommodations?" Chilton asked, prepared for another one-sided conversation.

Will surprised him by saying, "You said you could help me recover repressed memories."

Dr. Chilton blinked and straightened, smoothing the lapels of his jacket. “That’s right, Will. It’s one of my areas of expertise.”

“There are memories hidden in my mind,” Will said. “I want access to them. I’m willing to try any technique you recommend.”

Chilton smiled smugly, immensely self-satisfied. “I’m glad your vow of silence has come to an end, and we can be more productive in your sessions.”

Will ducked his head, by all appearances acquiescent. “I want to get better.”

Chilton took the bait, and Will had no trouble directing their session. It was easy to play the confused and troubled patient, though he didn’t bring up his accusation of Hannibal. Accusing Hannibal would make him look insane. Well. Maybe that would help with the plea.

By that night, Will had fallen into a semi-stupor, staring at the wall opposite the cot and trying not to look at the light glancing in the rectangular mirror over the sink. He only moved to stretch and piss and wash himself clean in the sink. The day was mercifully clear of panic attacks, and he allowed his mind to sift through the debris, using anger as a crutch when other emotions threatened to sweep him under.

Enough was enough. Will felt the frozen landscape of his mind and he made it thaw.

In his mind, Will waded into the freezing river. The cold bit through his body, but with time the rushing water became warm and comforting. He cleared his mind, and chunks of ice floated downriver.

After dinner, Matthew Brown came to escort Will to Hannah Reid’s cell. He loitered a few paces away, striking up a conversation with Miggs, whose voice soon filled the hall with repulsive cajoling. Will stepped up to the bars of Hannah’s cell, and she stood up from the bed and walked over to him.

“Funny running into you here,” Hannah said wryly, looking up at him. Her hair was beginning to grow out, and was raggy around her eyes and curling up on the back of her neck, what was once a men’s cut now distorted out of shape. “Come here often?”

“How are you, Hannah?” Will asked, cagey but not unkind.

“Think I’m taking it well.” Her chapped lips spread across her teeth, like she didn’t know how to smile. “I confessed, you know, so it looks like I’ll be here for good.”

“Did you confess to the ones before Baltimore?” Hannah Reid had started killing johns when she was a sex worker years before she displayed bodies in elaborate wire mechanisms in Baltimore. She had raped and murdered men, eventually escalating to involve death by rope and wire. Will had been the one to find her past kills, filling his mind with cold cases.

Hannah shook her head. “Presents to unwrap later.”

Will didn’t think of the families and friends of those men, still waiting for answers. “Are you satisfied with the attention you're receiving here?” He asked.

She shrugged. “Yeah. It's an interesting place. Can get boring. Concerned for my well being?”

Will returned a similar shrug. “I'm curious. You had hoped to get treatment for your eating disorder.”

“You're a kind man.” Hannah nibbled at her chapped lips, scarred from teething. “You didn't come to talk to me about that, did you?”

Will tilted his head and examined her. Somewhere in the hall, water dripped against concrete, sonorous in the damp dark. “When I interviewed you, I had the strangest impression that I had met you before,” Will said. “Like a dream confused with a memory. For a long time your face was distorted to me. I thought I had found you, and then… you slipped away.”

She looked him up and down, a spark of entertainment in her sunken eyes. “Our meeting was predestined, huh?” She wrinkled up her nose, grinning. “You’re the only one who could find me.”

“I did, didn’t I? That night at the observatory. I was convinced that you were a phantom of my inflamed imagination. But you were there, weren’t you?” Will examined her face for a sign of recognition, but she was hard to read, all nervous excitement and vacillating emotions. Will had brought her to Hannibal’s house in a fevered daze, at the height of his illness, and then been convinced that it was all a hallucination -- but if it wasn’t, then Hannah Reid was the piece of evidence Will was missing.

“Are you saying I appeared to you in your dreams?” Hannah asked playfully.

“When everything feels like a dream, I’m inclined to believe that even my hallucinations are real. Did you know Hannibal Lecter?”

“Mhmm,” Hannah hummed between pursed lips. “We never properly met,” she clarified. “Remember, I was following you for a while. So you could say that I knew him.”

“You followed me well enough to see that I was being stalked by the Copycat Killer.”

She looked away and scratched her head. “Not much to do between kills besides drive around. Being behind the wheel always calmed me.” She suddenly looked back at him and wagged her finger. “Don’t forget, Mr. Graham, I’m a chronic liar. Maybe I can’t tell the differences between dreams and reality either.”

Will stepped closer and lowered his voice, even though Matthew Brown had turned off the cameras for him; and Hannah stepped a little closer too. “If he let you live,” Will said, “Then he must be sure that you won't give him up.”

“Mm. I'm not sure I understand what you're getting at,” Hannah said, rocking her head side to side. “But it doesn't sound like I have much reason to help you discern what's real and what isn't.”

“You wanted to be found,” Will said. “What do you want now, Hannah?”

Hypnotism

Chapter Summary

Dr. Chilton puts Will under hypnosis, and Will attempts to manipulate pieces in the BHSCI.

Chapter Notes

it's a long chapter, and I even postponed a section. when I said this would be a short fic, what I really meant is that it will be shorter than mirrors. and it better be. I'm trying? p.s. it's @therru 's fault that Ardelia Mapp briefly shows up here.

thanks for commenting and reading along!come say hi on tumblr!

The sway of Dr. Chilton's pendulum, metronomic and ominous, was disturbingly familiar. Will's mind latched and rocked with the current of Chilton's words, tugging him gently down into the dark, and his damned susceptibility to the technique enraged Will to the point of tearing himself from the relaxation with a jolt of his head and a curse; then, frowning, Will apologized and bid the doctor to continue. The tide of hypnotism dragged Will down into a relaxed echo chamber, similar to sub-space and the edge of wakefulness, and Will knew then with a certainty that Dr. Lecter had done this to him before.

Though it was Dr. Chilton who spoke in a calm tone to guide his pliant mind, Will couldn't help but hear Dr. Lecter softly commanding him to reveal the grey-matter of his subconscious. *"Close your eyes, Will. Open your eyes. Good. You're doing so well, my boy."*

"You are feeling deeply relaxed," Dr. Chilton said, for once his voice not tinged with mocking superiority. "All the way through your body."

Will felt himself sink bonelessly into the gurney, the four belt restraints transforming from tedious to duly comforting, and he idly wished they were tighter. The weight of soft pressure against his body has been comforting before, as long as he stays on the very thin line between embraced and restrained.

"There are areas of your mind where memories are obscured like rooms with the lights off and the doors closed. Imagine yourself walking towards one of the doors. It's not locked. Open it, and turn on the light."

Dr. Chilton conducted images and memories from Will's submerged state with ease, the sodium amytal and Will's inherent susceptibility destroying any filter between his mind and mouth, and by the time they were done Chilton looked ill -- both disturbed and perversely fascinated. Memories and imagination from the past half a year were tangled in dense knots, a matted nest of antlers, tar, blood and razor wire. Like a good fisherman, Will waited for his line to snag on a thread until the whole memory came unraveling.

"How did you know Dr. Sutcliffe?"

"He was an acquaintance of Hannibal's from medical school. Hannibal brought me to him when I was sick, and had insisted on getting a brain scan."

"Tell me what happened."

"Dr. Sutcliffe came at Hannibal's recommendation. Had a wait list half a year long. I was sure he would find something wrong in my mind… but he found nothing. Guess the encephalitis was hiding. I went back for another brain scan a few days later, and found him murdered in his office."

"Did you kill him?"

"No. He was killed while I was there, though. I came out of the MRI in a hospital gown and found the carcass of his remains in his office, still fresh."

"Tell me what you remember."

The straps of the gurney dissolved and the room closed in around him, becoming the tunnel of the MRI. The whirring and thumping suddenly stopped, but Will lay paralysed on the tray in the claustrophobic tunnel. His skin burned and his hair was matted to his forehead with sweat, eyeballs twitching behind their lids. Slowly, the tray pulled out into the room. Standing at the foot of the tray was the wendigo, slick tar skin stretched over elongated bones. It pulled back the lid of Will's eyes to watch the rapid movement of his eyes, and then there was a swinging blade of light --

"When I count back from ten, you will fall into a deep and relaxing sleep. You will not remember this conversation."

"Yes…"

Dr. Sutcliffe was bound to his desk, the thick cable cutting through the soft flesh of his abdomen with the force of pressure from the winch. The room smelled of rot and burst bowels. Will saw like a tableau how the killer had knelt to bolt the winch to the floor and crank the handle.

"Like hauling in your catch. You pulled the lever and drew the line taut."

"I didn't kill him. I could recreate it, like the other scenes I've analyzed, but that's not the same as remembering."

"You don't know what happened while you were laying in the MRI?"

“No… there might have been someone there. Pulling me out to look at me before putting me back.”

“Who was it?”

“His face is obscured to me, monstrous. I thought it was my own, but--”

“You don't keep every fish you catch,” Hannibal said, embracing Will from behind and placing their cheeks together. “What determines your mercy?”

“I don't keep what I won't eat,” Will said, leaning back against Hannibal and holding the fishing rod firmly. The water of the stream rushed around them, slow and glittering in the sun. “Some are too small, or not the fish I was looking for.”

“You leave those you spare with a hook to remember you by.”

Chuckling, Will turned his head until they were nearly kissing. “Did I hook you, Dr. Lecter?”

“Tell me about discovering the body at the Baltimore Aquarium.”

“I remember getting the call in the morning and driving to the scene, seeing the police line and crowd. I approached the body beneath the pathway and felt everything slow. Beverly tried to keep me away from seeing the body, but I did, and it looked like me. It was supposed to be me. The next thing I knew, I was at Hannibal’s office.”

“What do you remember about the night before? Walk me through that day.”

“I… I was home in Wolftrap. But everything is blank.”

“I know what you want, Will. Even if you lie to yourself, even if you lie to me. You want to be used.” There was a hand twisting in his hair and a blade against his skin and the strobing light. Someone gasped and whimpered. His feet ached terribly, barbed wire slowly constricting his legs and feet. “You’ve thought so many times of being the victim that you made a surrogate for yourself. You found a boy who looked like you.” A swing of light. Hannibal had both hands on the back of his neck and pressed him into the mattress, fucking him hard. “In the safety of your fantasies, Will-as-killer and Will-as-victim dance to create a careful balance, relinquishing control in a controlled environment, whether to rend flesh or be absolutely dominated.” Bright, flashing, setting his mind on fire. Hannibal’s smile before pressing his nose to Will’s neck, inhaling with a purr of satisfaction.

Will was charming enough to get close to the surrogate without trouble. He injected him with his preferred chemical cocktail and the boy fell into unconsciousness into his arms, looking so much like his beloved that for a moment he was struck by the beauty of finally having him at his mercy.

“You want to kill me,” Hannibal said, guiding Will’s hands to his throat and goading him to put pressure. “You want to choke me, hurt me, dominate me.”

“The whole time, he was just using me.”

“Who?”

“Hannibal Lecter.”

“Tell me what you remember about what you did to him in Minnesota.”

“I don’t know what’s real.”

“How did you get there?”

“We drove from Baltimore in my car, with Abigail. I was trying to catch the Copycat Killer, and I thought that if I went back to Hobbs I could understand the connection to the Copycat.”

Will was in the antler room of Hobbs’ hunting cabin, Abigail framed by the dusty light from the lone window. “Do you ever hunt?” she asked.

“I’m so sorry, Abigail,” Will said, feet rooted to the spot. “I never wanted to hurt you.”

“But you thought of hurting me, didn’t you?” she asked, turning towards him with a somber look.

“Yes, I thought about hurting you. I dreamed about slitting your throat, and woke so revolted with myself that I wanted to die.”

“Fantasy and action… it’s similar, isn’t it? My dad was horrified of his desire to eat me,” she said with a shrug. “Didn’t stop him from slitting my throat in the kitchen.”

“I don’t remember killing you.” Will looked down at his hands. He was wearing heavy work gloves, covered in blood. Looking up, Abigail was gone, and beneath the window Hannibal sat. He was still clothed, with his hands wrapped in rope and secured above his head, and a heavy bruise above his eye and blood on his lips. “I don’t remember subduing you, either.”

“What do you remember?” Hannibal asked, panting and woozy from the blow to his head. Will walked over to him with a pair of gardening shears, and crouched before him, pointing the rusted tips at his throat. Hannibal arched his head away, watching Will wearily.

“I want to cut you,” Will said, looking down at his prey. Hannibal’s chest heaved. Will grabbed a handful of his overcoat and pulled it away from his body, slicing across the breast to the armhole seam, and all the way up the arm. Will tugged the fabric roughly, but did not accidentally snip Hannibal as he worked up the other arm, then ripped the shredded coat away. “I don’t understand how we got into this position,” he said, glancing around the room. “Blood indicates that I’ve already slit Abigail’s throat.” He grabbed Hannibal’s collar, gloved fingers forcing into the space between shirt, tie, and skin, tugging and half choking him so he could angle the clippers in and cut the damned clothes free. With a satisfying snip, the blades closed around the windsor knot, bisecting the silk tie.

“You could have easily subdued me with a knife to Abigail’s throat,” Hannibal suggested, wincing as the garden clippers slid between his bare skin and shirt and sweater, cutting down his torso.

“In a fight, you would overpower me.” Will pulled the halves of the shirt aside and stared down at Hannibal’s torso, the vulnerable organs protected by ribs and muscle, both insufficient. He could bare them easily, and thought of thrusting the clippers into Hannibal’s tense abdomen.

“That’s not exactly true,” Hannibal said, making his breathing calm. “You always held back before.”

Will cut away the rest of the shirt and tossed it aside. He tugged off Hannibal’s shoes and socks, throwing them out of the way as well, before cutting up the pant leg. “Stay still,” he warned, slipping the blade beneath the band of Hannibal’s underwear and cutting that too. “This scene is… disorganized,” Will complained as he went up the other leg. “Not like the others. I can’t remember what happened and neither can I make sense of the evidence. One of us killed Abigail. Her body was somehow disposed before I came to my senses.” Will pulled the remaining clothes away and sat on his heels, staring at Hannibal.

Will was crying. “Why did you do this to me?”

“Please stop, Will,” Hannibal pleaded. “It's me--”

“No!” Will screamed and grabbed Hannibal’s neck with both hands. “SHUT UP! You're a monster! You tricked me you fucking monster!” Hannibal’s face went red under the relentless pressure of his grip, eyes struggling to meet his. “I hate you! I hate what you made me! This is all your fucking fault!”

“Will, stay calm.”

“I can’t--”

Hannibal’s eyes rolled to the back of his head. Will let go of his neck, and backhanded him across the face. Hannibal made a choked sound, and gasped for air, head forced to the side. Will’s anger was cold. In fact, after the initial burst, he felt completely in control of himself. When Hannibal caught his breath, and his mouth worked like he might say something, Will wrapped his hands around his neck again, careful to not break his trachea, only releasing when Hannibal was at his limit. He gave him a few breaths, and then choked him again.

“I’m going to torture you,” Will said calmly. “I’ll finally show you what it’s like inside my head. And you’ll have asked for it, and wanted it.”

Hannibal grinned weakly. “That’s my boy,” he choked out.

Will Graham’s eyes were open, but he was no longer responsive. Dr. Chilton tried to get him out of the stupor, but his patient was rooted deep in the mire of his flashback. Eventually Dr. Chilton gave up, swallowing down his ill unease and loosening his tie.

“Mr. Brown?” Chilton said as he exited the room. “Please escort Will Graham back to his cell, and have the recording sent to my office.” He walked away without looking back.

Matthew watched him turn the corner. He sighed in exasperation and locked the door to the solitary room, since Dr. Chilton had failed to do so. He then entered the small room between the solitary cells, more of a long closet, to deal with the recording equipment. The tiny monitor showed that Will was laying compliantly on the gurney, not moving an inch. Matthew squinted at him for a moment, paused the feed, and played the session from the beginning.

"Mr. Graham?" Matthew called gently, standing over Will. The man didn't respond, staring up at the ceiling, or rather, at nothing at all. Matthew pouted and watched him for a minute. He tried waving his hands in front of Will's face and snapping his fingers by his ears, but there was no response. Matthew shook his shoulder, gently at first, and then a little firmer. "Jesus, Mr. Graham, what am I going to do with you?"

Sighing, Matthew brushed the curls out of his eyes. Experimentally, he wrapped a lock of Will's hair around a finger and tugged, hard. The muscles of Will's brow pinched, and the pupils of his eyes contracted. "That's it, Mr. Graham." Matthew smiled and took a bit more hair in his hand to tug.

"Unnn." Will groaned, and Matthew froze, eyes as wide as his grin.

"Can you hear me, Mr. Graham?" Matthew asked. Will blinked, and closed his eyes for a long moment, seeming to come awake when they opened again. Matthew's hand went slack around Will's hair, but he just couldn't help himself, so he grabbed it in a tight fist and bent Will's head back as far as it would go, baring the long line of his neck. Will gasped, but his eyes refocused and swiveled to Matthew.

"What are you doing, Matthew?" Will asked calmly.

"I'm sorry," Matthew said quickly, though he was still smiling, and let go of Will's hair. "I was trying to wake you up."

"I wasn't asleep."

"Well, you weren't--"

"I was remembering." Will's voice was icy, and his eyes narrowed on the orderly. "Remove my restraints."

Matthew didn't. He hovered close to Will's face, looking intently into his eyes. "You're the Copycat Killer," he said, like testing the waters. He frowned, as if displeased with what he saw, and backed away.

"That's the prevailing hypothesis," Will replied. The orderly worried his lip between his teeth, looking away from Will. "Matthew. Look at me."

Matthew's eyes snapped to Will. "Very good," Will said. "Now, undo my restraints and take me back to my cell."

“You’re *not* the Copycat Killer,” Matthew said, but he walked back to the gurney and began to remove the straps. “Or, you really are delusional.”

“I’m not delusional,” Will said calmly. “You know me, Matthew,” he reassured him. “I’m the perfect mimic. I get inside killer’s heads and understand them like no one else can. That’s how I caught the Marionette Murderer.”

Matthew finished unbuckling the restraints, but still looked troubled. “I thought you had killed them," he said, sounding disappointed.

Will sat up, turning to Matthew. He squeezed Matthew’s bicep firmly and leaned close, bringing them together, and Matthew’s heart began to pound. “I don’t hunt small game,” Will said, looking up with a radiant smile. “I hunt the predators.”

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Now that Will was no longer in solitary, he received a small pile of mail that had been accumulating over the last six weeks. None of the letters were addressed from anyone Will knew, which wasn’t surprising. He looked through them anyway. Some were from admirers, and others from supposed doctors wielding terms inaccurately. One, however, was from a student.

> *Professor Graham,*
>
> *I cannot accept the sudden termination of Quantico’s most rigorous and insightful instructors. For entirely selfish reasons regarding my own education, I have taken it upon myself to continue your criminal profiling lesson.*
>
> *Preliminary Criminal Profile - The Copycat Killer*

Will sat back in his bed and read through the essay. He had been permitted paper and one pencil, and took it in hand to make corrections. It felt good to slip back into the role of professor, mercilessly editing and pointing out flaws in argument or analysis. The profile wasn’t bad, either; the student had struck upon some of the same insights Will had, but the overall perspective was fresh and untainted by assumptions about Will’s health. Ardelia Mapp argued that the Copycat’s kills were primarily contextual and goal-oriented, and therefore that the motivations behind each kill could not be fully understood without consideration of their source material. Unlike other copycat killers, the Copycat didn’t recreate kills exactly but embellished upon them, suggesting that it was not a new killer learning through idolization, but an established serial killer. *“The Copycat Killer had the confidence to use new tools and display in different locations, all without leaving a trace of evidence behind.”* The exceptions were Nicholas Boyle’s blood found in Melissa Schurr, and Hannibal Lecter, who escaped with his life. Will followed the footnote next to Boyle’s name:

5. Nicholas Boyle's body was found in Minnesota on April 3rd. Time of death could not be precisely established as the body had been frozen, but the body was estimated to have been buried anywhere from 3 weeks to 4 months prior. CoD: Stab wound to the abdomen.

The Copycat knows how to plant evidence, Will thought, filing away the mystery of Nicholas Boyle for later.

Ardelia rightly proposed that the Copycat had a fascination with other killers and the Behavioral Analysis Unit, and was likely someone with access to the investigations. As for the trophies, she noted that the Copycat took large trophies -- lungs, tongue, two feet of intestines, and in the case of Samuel Gross, Will's surrogate, the entire contents of the abdominal cavity. However, the trophies the Copycat Killer made -- Will's fishing lures -- used small amounts of what was actually taken. Either the Copycat kept the trophies to use as bait as well as lures, or he did something else with the meat.

Will wondered if Hannibal had a kill room filled with freezers for preserving human organs.

Ardelia went on to compare the Copycat's kills to the Chesapeake Ripper's. There were, of course, far more points of comparison than contrast.

Will wondered what he would have done with the rest of the organs, if he really was the killer. The fishing lures were elegant. He worked on them to clear his mind. Maybe the rest of the meat would be buried in the ground, or fed to the dogs.

"I'm very careful with what I put into my body," Hannibal had said, smiling at Will over the protein scramble.

Slowly, Will set down the pencil and looked up from the essay to stare at the brick wall. Nausea bubbled up in his throat, as he remembered the look of concealed amusement on Dr. Lecter's face as Will took the first bite of his cooking and found it delicious, the first of many meals shared between them. Dr. Lecter and his restrained but obsessive pleasure in cooking and sharing food; and the hungry gleam in his eyes when he had stuck his tongue in the cut he had made in Will's pectoral, lips stained with blood. Will had asked Hannibal to cut him. He had wanted to be wanted -- and Dr. Lecter wanted to consume him.

Will went cold, and for a long time sat with the paper against his bent knees and lead in his limbs, because Hannibal Lecter had been eating his trophies, and so had Will.

• • • • • • • • • •

"I have a theory," Hannah said, sitting cross-legged and hunched on the floor of her cell, while Will sat in the chair outside her cell, hands in the handcuffs before him. She held up

one finger on each hand and slowly brought them together. “I think people like us attract each other.”

“People like us?” Will asked.

“People with…” She mulled over her words. “The inherent potential to kill. Us ‘abnormal behavior’ types. You can kind of sense when a person lacks certain inhibitions, wouldn’t you say?” She glanced over at Matthew Brown, who was leaning against a wall and watching their exchange.

“There is certainly evidence to suggest that certain pairs who kill together bring out and exaggerate violence in one another,” Will admitted. “Many serial killers are solitary creatures. Did you ever get lonely, Hannah?”

“Hmm…” She tilted her head up, and Will could see the individual muscles of her cheeks beneath gaunt skin.

“I can help you with your loneliness, girlie!” Miggs called from down the hall.

“Yeah give me your cock big boy!” She shouted back, head snapping forward with a grin. “Love to bite it off and shove it in your man hole!”

Will rubbed his eyes as Miggs and Hannah threw obscenities at each other. It was bad enough hearing Miggs brag about the kids he’d raped without having Hannah goad him on until the others in Block B started screaming.

“They sure do make a pair, don’t they?”

Will looked over at the cell between his and Hannah’s, where Gideon was leaning with his hands outside the bars. Gideon had killed his wife and her family, and was one of Dr. Chilton’s favorite patients, but Will knew very little else about him. “It’s criminal to keep them in the same block,” Gideon added with a lilt of humor.

“Bad for our mental health,” Will conceded with a similar lilt to his voice.

“Dr. Abel Gideon,” he introduced himself. “I don’t believe we’ve met.”

“Will Graham.”

“Crazy cunt… maybe if your father fucked you better you wouldn’t be such a slut.”

“My dad fucked me better than your daddy fucked you.”

“WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU SAY?!”

Will groaned and stood up from the chair, wandering over to Gideon. “It’s best to just let them tire each other out,” Gideon said with an annoyed sigh, eyeing Will. “Our lewd nighttime lullaby.”

“Almost makes you want to go back to solitary.”

“Rumor has it that you’re the one who caught her,” Gideon said.

“I was on the team,” Will admitted.

“A hunter of other hunters.” Gideon smiled. “Was she your biggest catch, Mr. Graham?”

“She’s certainly the most theatrical I’ve caught, so far.”

“So far?” Gideon raised his eyebrows. “Are you still on the hunt?”

Will smiled thinly. “You could say that. Were you a hunter, Dr. Gideon?”

Gideon smiled serenely. “I’m not sure I know what I was anymore, or, for that matter, what I am now.” The smile faded. “It’s an awful thing, to not know who you are.”

Will nodded. “I’m familiar with confusion.”

“Is Dr. Chilton helping you with your confusion?”

There was a touch of bitterness in the way Gideon said his name, so Will shot the question back. “Is he helping with yours?”

“I would say more like… exacerbating it. Ahh--” Gideon tilted his head. The hall had fallen silent again. He put his hand to his ear. “Hear that? Beautiful. I’ll let you get back to your conversation. Matthew, why don’t you keep me company? Graham is getting all your special attention.” He called over Matthew, who had obviously been listening to their conversation, and gave Will a wink.

Will walked back to Hannah’s cell, standing this time. She looked up at him apologetically. “Couldn’t help myself.”

“If you’re going to waste my time, I won’t speak with you,” Will said flatly.

Hannah’s contrite expression fell immediately, leaving her expressionless. “You’re the one who wants something from me, remember?”

“I need something from you,” Will admitted, “But I think you find my company more interesting than Miggs’.”

“I find myself interested in watching things play out,” Hannah said, resting her chin in her hand.

“Thought you might be.” Will made a gamble. “I think you knew Hannibal Lecter.”

“Oh yeah. We met at the opera.”

“You tailed both of us.”

“I mean, you were together a lot…” She smiled.

“Therapists are your favorite people to manipulate. I bet you were curious about him.”

“What's not to be curious about?” She bit her lip as if resisting a smile, and Will had little doubt that she had been interested in Hannibal, but it was just a hunch that they had conspired together; a hunch and a hallucination that might have been more real than Hannibal made Will believe. “You seem concerned with your surviving victim,” she added. “But what do you imagine I have to do with him?”

“When we talked about your kills,” Will said in a slow drawl, “We compared you to a god creating her own physics where the deaths of men were inevitable. Pulling strings and watching your puppets fall.”

Her eyes had been glazed and red-rimmed from starvation, unfocused and drooping, but they shined now with manic pride. *She sought his approval.* “Why would a god seek the company of mortals?” Will wondered aloud.

“She wouldn't.” Hannah smiled up at him. From here Will could see that she was missing clumps of hair. “I can see you pulling at strings, Mr. Graham, but I'm not the sort of person who can be manipulated.” She shrugged. “There's nothing I want anymore.”

“You're beyond it all.” Will took in her small form, so completely hidden by the jumpsuit. She wasn't really surviving here, either. “How would you like to see your sister again?”

In the resulting quiet, Will could hear Gideon and Matthew speaking quietly. “You know my sister?” Hannah's asked in nearly a whisper.

“Yes. I can convince her to visit you.” Will said it with confidence that he didn't feel, but it was his only shot, and by Hannah’s distant look Will knew that the idea held some appeal to her.

“Elliot doesn't want to speak to me,” she said, and then, as an afterthought, “If I gave you anything on the Copycat, he would torture me to death.”

“Is he confident in that threat, or in your dog-like loyalty?”

She scowled up at him. “I have no interest in meddling with his affairs.”

Will squatted down so that they were eye to eye. “Hannah. You're dying. Don't you want front row seats to what happens next?”

Matthew Brown lingered in the doorway of Will’s cell, hesitating before undoing his handcuffs. Will could sense the excitement rolling off him in waves, a twitch in his grin and the predatory tilt of his head. He was like a kid in a candy store, mingling with the violently insane criminals, and unable to hide his enthusiasm from Will. At the same time, he obviously manipulated the rules of the hospital with care, both observant and self-restrained. Interacting with the young man was precarious, and Will knew that if he didn’t strike the right balance, Matthew could spiral out of his control. In a short amount of time, Brown had attached himself to Will, and his obsession was coiled under the surface, ready to spring. Will

wasn't sure that Brown's interest was sexual in nature, but it was driven by a desire for power, and that was dangerous enough.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Graham?" Matthew asked, glancing down at Will's bound wrists.

Will stepped closer, so their feet were nearly touching, and leaned close to whisper and foster Matthew's sense of conspiracy. "I need the address of Elliot Reid, for correspondence," Will said, watching the pulse quicken in Matthew's neck. "Have you noticed anything interesting?"

Matthew swallowed. "I know Hannibal's schedule, but I don't have much time off to trail him." He tilted his head, teeth shining, a bit too close for comfort. "What do you want with him?"

Will ignored the clawing feeling in his stomach and made himself reflect what Matthew saw in him -- a remorseless and intelligent hunter. A creature of abyssal eyes and twining antlers. "I have unfinished business with Hannibal Lecter."

"What will you do to him?" Matthew asked, leaning back to look into Will's eyes, looking nearly like a man falling in love.

Will smiled. "I'll show you, if you're good for me."

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Will slid into the murky depths of his memory, searching for Hannah's face. The hypnosis sessions with Dr. Chilton had tugged threads loose, and Will now followed them, ignoring the fear. The highway slipped beneath his car, headlights making the darkness bubble like a living thing near the edges of the road, tar melting through the seams of his cracked skin. The observatory. The gun. Hannibal's dining room. The white median line on the road blinked at him like a strobe light as he drove, as he dived.

"I didn't know where else to go," Will heard himself say in the shivering dark. *"I'm… I'm having a hard time thinking. I feel like I'm losing my mind. I don't know what's real."*

"It's 10:27 PM. You're in Baltimore, Maryland. Your name is Will Graham." Hannibal's voice emerged as well, calm and steady.

"I don't care who I am. Tell me… if they're real."

The memory snapped into place. Will was suddenly in Hannibal's dining room, watching the scene unfold from a third perspective: *looking at himself standing by the fireplace and aiming a gun at the head of the table, where Hannah Reid sat in a carhart jacket, looking curious. Hannibal stood close to Will, hands half raised as if calming a wild dog.*

"Who do you see, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Present-Will stepped around the table, watching how Hannibal was careful not to look at Hannah. It felt like he was recreating a crime scene, imagination bringing the facts to life. He saw clearly how wild and sick he had looked, drenched in sweat and trembling all over.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs. The Marionette. I don't know, the faces..." Will frowned. "Who do you see?"

"I don't see anyone."

"She's. Right. THERE." Will gasped, punctuating each word with a thrust of his gun, tears welling.

"There's no one there, Will."

The entire time, Hannah watched the scene play out quietly, picking up on her role in Hannibal's plan. Will looked at her, insisting, "You're lying."

"We're alone. You came here alone. Do you remember coming here?" Hannibal stepped closer, and Will looked back at him, eyes wide in fear.

"Please don't lie to me," he begged.

But Hannibal had lied to him. He had been so confident in his ability to manipulate Will's mind that he had convinced Will that the killer her was hunting wasn't four feet away from him. Will watched as *Hannibal calmed himself down and took the gun away, and guided Will to sit in the chair to Hannah's right, while Hannibal took the seat to the left.*

"Do you still see her?" Hannibal asked.

"This is fascinating," Hannah said.

"You're hallucinating, Will," Hannibal continued. "You're perfectly safe."

"She's... looking at me." Will licked his lips, still meeting her eyes. "Speaking to me."

"What does she say?" Hannibal asked, looking only at Will.

Hannah crossed her arms with a mild look of annoyance. "I'm right here, guys."

Will could have laughed at the absurdity. Instead, he watched the three of them carefully, the memory unfolding with terrifying accuracy.

"She says she's right here. Do you really not see her?"

"I want you to listen to what she says. Tell me every word."

Hannah cocked her head, studying Will. "How did you find me, Will?"

"I don't remember," Will answered, and then to Hannibal, "She asked how I found her."

"You should know," Hannah said.

"If you're... in my head, then you tell me."

"Will. Focus."

"If you don't remember how to find me," Hannah teased in a lilting voice, "then more pigs are going to die."

Will visibly struggled with his words, failing to concentrate as sweat dripped down his face. "She says... that if I don't remember how I found her then more people... more pigs are going to die."

"That may be true," Hannibal said.

"Why did you use pigs?" Will asked her, leaning forward on his elbows. "Is that a reference to the Chesapeake Ripper? Why me?"

"You have a shadow following you. I was curious to see another pulling the strings..." Slowly, she turned her head to Hannibal, smiling broadly. "What do you want to do with him?"

Will realized now that Hannah had been talking to Hannibal. *What do you want to do with him?* Pigs. A sounder of kills. Hannah Reid knew that Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper. The pigs had been for Hannibal. She knew that the FBI was looking for emancipated minors from Baltimore because Will had told Hannibal. His mind spun with the revelations. The depth of Hannibal's violent manipulations was staggering.

"No." Will gasped weakly.

"Will, what is she saying?" Hannibal asked. Like he couldn't fucking hear her.

"You should kill him," she said.

"She's says I should kill you."

"It's alright, Will." Hannibal smiled softly. "You're safe. Thoughts cannot kill."

"If you know what's good for you," Hannah continued coyly, looking at Hannibal, speaking to him, "you would kill him. Do you know what's good for you?" She reached for Hannibal's arm.

"Don't touch him!" Will shouted. He began to convulse, falling back against his chair. This should have been the moment that Will's memory gave out, but it kept playing; somehow, through the seizure, he had been aware of what was happening around him.

Hannibal stood and walked around the table, checking Will's eyes and taking his pulse. "He's having a mild seizure," Hannibal announced to the room.

Hannah leaned back in her chair, watching them. "Well, that was fun."

Hannibal turned to his guest. "Do you want him to kill me?"

Hannah shrugged. "I thought that was what you wanted."

Hannibal stood at Will's side, keeping a hand on his shoulder and rubbing soothing circles that the man couldn't feel. "It's not about what I want," he replied. "What matters is what Will wants."

"You've really fucked him up you know," Hannah said with a jerk of her chin. "That's the problem with pulling strings up here--" She tapped her skull. "--you can't control what happens, not really. Your play thing is falling apart."

Hannibal frowned in mild displeasure. "You break yours too quickly."

"And I know exactly how they will break. You can't control how Will breaks."

"You're going to get caught, Hannah."

"I know." She chuckled. "It's cliche, but i'm looking forward to all the attention I'll get in the asylum."

"It's a shame you're retiring early." Hannibal ran his hand through Will's hair. Will wanted to throttle him.
"I don't want to be on the run for the rest of my life," she said, looking around the room as if bored. "That sounds so tiring. I don't have the means to just flee the country and start over somewhere."

"You're underestimating yourself."

"Are you worried that I might tell them something when I get caught?" she asked the ceiling with an annoyed sigh.

"It's crossed my mind."

"I won't." She smiled at him, looking suddenly like a flirtatious young woman. "What, are you going to kill me?"

Hannibal removed his hand from Will and held his hands behind his back, now giving her his full attention. "If you're retiring, why shouldn't I?"

"Might be nice to have an ally on the inside." She leaned forward, looking suddenly wistful. "Come on, Dr. Lecter. Let me show you my final play. Let me have my fun with the most clever doctors they can throw at me; let me treat my fucking anarexia nerviosa." Her eyes fell to the table and her calloused hands, the bleeding cuticles. "You're having fun, aren't you? I thought we were having fun."

"You're volatile, Hannah," Hannibal said, not unkindly. "If I think you will put my well being at risk, I will take everything from you."

She looked up at him, eyes shining and hollow. "Do you like me, Dr. Lecter?"

He stepped forward and patted her on the head as if she was a child. "I like you very much, Hannah."

The memory blurred, obscure again; but Will held on to the familiar setting of the dining room, running his hands across the heavy wood table. It was early morning now, snow falling outside the glass doors, and only the dim winter light illuminating the space. “You kept her alive even though she knew who you were,” Will said aloud, “Because you were curious what would happen.”

He felt more than heard Hannibal enter the room. “At this point, you had already planned to have me in the hospital.” The betrayal of that stung deep.

“Ms. Reid has no evidence against me, and her testimony would be easily dismissed,” Hannibal said, walking along Will’s side of the table, and Will wondered if he turned what version of Hannibal he would see.

“She could have evidence on you,” Will replied. “She followed both of us. She could have held onto evidence as an insurance for her life.”

“Evidence of what?”

Will thought. “Photographs. Taking the bodies to the Symphony Hall or the Aquarium. She must have seen you do something that… sucked her into your orbit.”

“Hmm.” Hannibal kept his distance. Will turned around. Hannibal wore a robe over his sleep clothes, looking disarmed in a way that was now unsettling. “And what murderous act did she witness?” He asked. “You assume that she knows I am the Chesapeake Ripper. Perhaps she saw in me the same qualities that drew Tobias to me, a gravitational pull that brings like-minded people together.”

“A theory of attraction,” Will said venomously.

“What do you think attracted me to you?” Hannibal’s face was neutral but not hard, softened by the early morning light and his complete confidence and ease.

“You knew that I would see what you are,” Will said slowly, putting the pieces together for the first time. “You could have simply killed me but instead you drew me closer to you. Playing with fire. It was reckless. But my illness allowed you to manipulate my mind and make me think I was you.”

“Did I make you in my image?” Hannibal asked. “Or did I give you a mirror with which to behold yourself?”

“I’m not a killer,” Will snapped. “You made me think I was something I’m not, confident that I would take the blame for your kills so you could remain hidden in plain sight.” But then, Will remembered the last thing Hannibal had said to him.

“The answer for how to survive this lies already in your mind,” Hannibal said, again, smiling conspiratorially. “Only you can find it.”

“You wanted me to realize.” Will felt the floor slipping from beneath his feet, stretched to a gossamer barrier holding him up from falling into the abyss below. “And so you put me in a position where everyone would doubt what I would say. Keeping Hannah and I alive, imprisoned in the asylum -- it’s all part of your design.”

Hannibal looked pleased.

Delusion

Chapter Summary

Hannibal pays Will a visit. Beverly comes by with a case. Alana is trying, and failing. Matthew gets cocky.

Chapter Notes

apologies for the late update, but I think you will find it is worth it ;3 thanks for reading and come say hi on tumblr!

content warnings at the bottom of the chapter. you might want to check! it's a sinful chapter. also this is not beta'd and I didn't have time to proof as much as I usually do, so there might be some errors I missed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was spring in Baltimore, but inside the monotonous confines of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally insane, Will would never know it. Perhaps the worst thing for his mental health was not the inherent stress of being imprisoned, but the lack of environmental stimuli. Will only spoke with a few people, and the scenery never changed. Even though Will sought simplicity in his life and routine, he needed to feed his active mind with interaction and analysis, and without any, he could only turn to his own mind for sustenance -- and the landscape of his mind was no longer safe.

Will needed to interact with reality, and the occupants of the hospital did little to ground him, feeling more like phantoms encouraging his latent madness. Sessions with Alana were not helping his sense of reality, since she was convinced Will was paranoid and delusional. It was incredibly frustrating to have her awaken all the doubt seething in his mind, and making him question again and again what he knew in his gut was true. He needed to sink his teeth into something real. Even getting a case would be a welcome relief, though no one was seeking his professional opinion lately.

Instead, Will got Hannibal as a visitor.

Will heard him walk down the hall of Block B like the ominous reverberations of the feathered stag’s hooves against the concrete, a primordial creature of his nightmares stalking closer. He saw the stag stop in front of his cell, all ruffling feathered muscles and black crown of antlers. Will blinked, and the superimposed image faded.

Hannibal walked in front of his cell, calmly clasping his hands behind his back and regarding Will from behind the smooth stone of his mental fortress, telegraphing none of his thoughts as he said, “Hello, Will.”

For a moment, Will was unsure if this was real or just another conversation in his mind. Hannibal was as impeccably presented as Will always imagined him, not a hair out of place nor a loose thread on his bespoke dark suit, seeming less like a man than an image of one. “Hello, Dr. Lecter,” Will said, parroting back the same flat tone and slow cadence that Hannibal had just used to greet him, but with a bitter working of his jaw. Anger, disgust, shame, and fear mingled under his skin, reactions pulled from his body just from being in proximity with the man.

Hannibal did not react to the formality. “You looked like you were lost in thought.”

“Not lost,” Will said, nearly smirking. “Not anymore. I’ve navigated my way through the wreckage left in the wake of illness and confusion.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Hannibal replied, sounding sincere. Then, carefully, “Alana has mentioned that you’ve found a new perspective on your experience.”

“Everything is crystal clear to me now.” Will did not, then, bother to hide the poison from his words. “I used to hear my thoughts inside my skull with the same tone, timbre, and accent as if the words were coming out of my mouth.”

“And now?”

“Now my inner voice sounds like you. I can't get you out of my head.”

Hannibal considered this, features opening with guarded interest. He parted his lips with an almost inaudible sound, as always choosing his words with extreme care. “We shared the kind of intimacy that can blur the boundaries of the self. For better or for worse, we housed within each other aspects of ourselves that could not be contained alone.”

“You housed plenty inside me, Dr. Lecter,” Will said with a sneer, enjoying the lewd play of words. “Did you come to see what’s been excavated from the ruins?”

“I have tremendous faith in your resilience,” Hannibal said.

“You know my limits intimately.” Will tried to keep his emotions buried, but to his own ears his voice still carried a desperate bite. “You broke your toy, Dr. Lecter. Playtime is over.”

Hannibal smiled sadly at that. If Will were being honest with himself, he wanted to tell Hannibal so much -- how the only comfort these days was conversing with the doctor in his mind; how Will missed the man he thought he knew and how that longing compounded his self-loathing into near-suicidal grotesquery; how Will’s sense of self was so warped that nothing made sense except Hannibal. He wanted to hurl every accusation his way, wanted to gloat at how Will had figured him out despite everything, and would burn the world to get his hands around Dr. Lecter’s neck one last fucking time. The tremendous desire for Hannibal to

know everything that was happening in Will's mind was precisely the kind of vulnerability he would never give Hannibal again.

"I haven't come to play with you," Hannibal said, and Will very nearly rolled his eyes. "I have struggled with the decision of whether or not to visit you, and whether it would only harm you. Ultimately, I made a selfish decision. I wanted to see you."

Will bit his tongue, hard. That helped a little. "I had hoped you'd spare yourself the trauma of seeing me." What was before a honest sentiment was now delivered sarcastically.

"Part of the healing process is confronting trauma so that the traumatic event can be reconfigured into a memory with the same consistency and color of other experiences. Making the incomprehensible coherent."

"I'm glad this is healing for one of us."

Hannibal blinked slowly. He took his hands from behind his back and adjusted one of his cuffs. Will's eyes drifted down and he noticed a pink swatch of scar tissue by Hannibal's thumb, from one of the fishing hooks. "I also came to tell you that I am not pressing charges," Hannibal said, "Though I will still be a witness in your trial, if it comes to that."

"Why wouldn't you press charges?" Will asked after a moment, baffled.

"I don't feel that you are responsible."

Will fought the urge to put his head in his hands, and wrestled away the confusion from his features. "That makes two of us," he snapped.

"It's good that you're angry, Will," Hannibal said. "Anger is a galvanizing emotion. You only need temper and focus it into a suitable tool."

Like a skewer to stick down your throat . Instead, Will searched for a way to stick him with his words. "Revulsion is more apt than anger," he said, stepping towards the bars with a sneer. "Everything looks so horribly ugly now."

This close, Will could see Hannibal's expression dull, like lights had dimmed behind his human mask, and it was immensely satisfying. Will touched the bars with his fingertips, tilted his head, and leaned forward as if sharing a whispered intimacy or goading for a kiss, and smiled, as charming as he knew how. "I thought I loved you. How funny is that?" His voice dropped lower, almost seductive. "Guess I was pretty desperate to be understood by someone."

"Cruel boy," Hannibal said, wistfully.

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“I’m suddenly very popular,” Will said with a self-deprecating smirk. “Though something tells me this isn’t a personal call.”

Beverly Katz sucked her cheeks in slightly, looking like she might cuss Will out. “You're right, it's not,” she said tersely.

“You're angry with me.”

“I'm basically furious with everyone,” she said. “And, yeah, that includes you.”

Will sighed and leaned back in his chair, trying to let go of her tension. “What's your pet theory?”

“Do you know why I like fibers?”

“No bullshit?”

“No bullshit. Fibers are exactly what they are and where they're from. You can't lie at that level.”

“The evidence speaks for itself.”

She leaned forward, clasping her hands tightly on the tabletop. “I found everything in your lures.”

“I didn't put them there,” Will said, already knowing that she wouldn't believe him.

“Don't bullshit me, Graham.”

“I'm not.”

“Whatever.” She reached into her bag and slapped a manila folder on the table, jostling the contents inside so a crime scene photo peeked out. “I need to borrow your brain.”

Will glanced down at the file, not looking too close at the corner of a photograph he could see. “I'm in recovery.”

She grinded her teeth together. “Look. No matter what else I think, I believe you got something out of catching these fuckers.” She paused, looking momentarily nauseous before turning her keen eyes back on him. “It's children.”

Will closed his eyes for a moment. “I'm going to need something from you.”

“Jesus, Graham.” Exasperated, she crossed her arms over her chest. “Fine, what do you want? And if you say Hannibal Lecter --” Will looked at her. “What the fuck, Will? For your information, we *did* investigate him, and found nothing. Nada, zip, zilch. I personally combed every one of his expensive suits.”

“Clean as a whistle, weren't they?” Will said grimly. At least Jack had heeded his suspicion.

“Do you know how fucked up that is?” Beverly’s eyes were wide, revolted at him.

Will cringed. “Yeah, I know how it looks.”

She shook her head. “Unbelievable. You know, I didn't want to believe you knew what you were doing this whole time. You were so fucking convincing. But shit like this -- we know, for a *fact*, what you did to him.”

“I know. I'm asking you to take a fresh look at that scene.”

She scowled at him. “I saw plenty.”

“Did you see how I managed to make Abigail’s body disappear? Look at the blood stains again. It doesn't make sense.”

She looked at him for a long time, wrestling with her disgust of Will and desperation to catch their perp. Will could relate. Finally she dropped her eyes to the folder, defeated. “Fine,” she growled. “I'll take another look.”

“That's all I'm asking.”

She pushed the file to his side of the table, careful to keep her hands as far away from him as possible. Will spread the contents out, and felt his blood drain out.

“Is this the only body?”

“Yeah. We can't find anything else like it.”

Will considered for a moment. “The mutilations are post mortem. He’s not interested in torturing her.” He folded his fingers into the palm of his hands, putting pressure on his fingernails. The victim’s had all been removed, as well as her eyes. She had also been scalped. “He’s done this before. He’s... looking for the right parts.” Will spread out the faces of other missing children from the region and began sorting through the ones with the same hair, eye, and skin color. “He might be hunting in a broad region, but he must have a workspace since he properly disposed of the others.”

“You're sure there were others before this?” Beverly asked. “We haven't found anything remotely similar to this pattern of mutilation.”

“Yeah. Pretty sure.” Will tapped his fingers on the table. “This isn't experimentation.” He picked up a picture of the body.

“The body disposal is pretty amateaur,” Beverly said. “Why did we find this one?”

“Something interfered with his habits. Organized mutilation of the corpse, disorganized disposal. He’ll take another kid soon to fix his mistakes.”

Beverly cursed under her breath. “Would love to catch them before that.”

They were both silent. Sometimes their job was waiting for the next body to drop. Well, it wasn't his job anymore. Will wracked his mind for something else that could help. “You should expand your search to boys of the same age as well,” he finally said. At her look, he shrugged. “Just a hunch. Those parts don’t matter. It’s all cosmetic.”

Beverly frowned, and pulled the sheet of fiber analysis from the folder. “Hannibal said a similar thing. He’s got your job now.”

Will rubbed the bridge of his nose. “He always did love getting cozy with the BAU.” When he finally blinked away the mounting tension, Beverly was watching him warily.

“You really think he’s the Copycat Killer,” she said.

“Worse than that. I think he’s also the Chesapeake Ripper.” Will smiled faintly. “I’ve got fantastic taste in men.”

“You’re serious.” She sounded oddly fascinated. Will supposed it was different hearing it straight from the horse’s mouth -- Will didn’t sound like a man who was tormenting his surviving victim, but one who actually believed his victim had committed his crimes.

“I’m very aware that I sound delusional,” Will said. “If I wasn’t the one saying it, maybe you all would take a closer look. Surgical background. Close to the investigation.” He began to tick off his fingers. “Meticulous. Narcissist. Sadist -- I know that one intimately. He killed Tobias Budge, probably met him at the same symphony hall they both displayed bodies. He was in Minnesota when we found Hobbs.” Will was running out of fingers. “Has keys to my house. He knew Dr. Sutcliffe. He knew me well enough to twist my brain into an unrecognizable shape and hide my illness.” Will shook his head.

Beverly was very still, eyes narrowed. She was actually thinking it over, and Will felt something desperate flare in his chest. “Ok. Ok, Will, you’ve got me curious. But tell me: if Hannibal is a killer, how did you get so close without seeing it?”

Will didn't want to tell her that it was because he got too close.

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Alana brought Hannibal with her for their next session.

As Will stared at both of them he felt a tightness in his throat that reminded him of childhood, and old reaction to smother his emotions deep down to keep himself from crying, and swallowed the feeling quickly, though that terrain was overturned with graves. He sat in the interview cage and willed himself to numbness. Alana greeted him and asked him how he was, polite but nervous, and instead of answering Will stared at her for a long time. It was the longest they had ever made eye contact. Will had never weaponized his gaze before, but there

were few tools available to him. He looked and did not lose himself in what he saw. Will understood exactly what she thought this meeting was.

Alana dropped her gaze and looked to Hannibal, both seeking and giving reassurance. It was mildly gratifying to make someone look away first.

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal said, taking a step forward and making himself look as nonthreatening as possible. Will turned his gaze to him, letting the silence get awkward.

“You think I’m delusional,” Will said to Alana at last. “And I’m not. This conversation is going to be a dead end.”

“I thought it could be productive if the two of you talked,” she said to both of them, Hannibal giving a small nod in agreement. He almost looked nervous, the fucker.

There was no evidence against Hannibal Lecter except what was waiting in Will’s mind, and a testimony Hannah Reid would probably never give, and that would certainly never be believed. Will was tired. Maybe he should be luring Hannibal into a false sense of security so that he might slip up, but Will was loathe to pretend he was the killer he now knew he wasn't.

“What about *our* alibi?” Will asked Hannibal. “It's just my word against yours?”

“I'm afraid so,” Hannibal said faintly.

Will chuckled dryly and rubbed his face. “I know who I’d believe.”

“It's easier to accept that I am responsible for everything than to to acknowledge your culpability,” Hannibal said.

“Actually, exactly none of this is easy,” Will snapped.

“I've put you in a compromised position.”

“Hannibal and I have been talking frankly about the ways that we failed to protect you,” Alana said. “You are not solely responsible for what happened.”

“To err is human,” Will said, slow and bitter. “Baltimore’s finest psychiatrists couldn't prevent my train from hurtling off the tracks.”

“Will,” Hannibal entreated.

“Don't you dare say it.” Will grimaced. Hannibal wanted to apologize, and Will tasted bile at the back of his throat. Hannibal hesitated, and Will was filled with the irresistible urge to hurt him.

“I know this is difficult,” Alana said to both of them, infuriatingly playing the mediator. “But,” she added, addressing Will, “we are both here because we want to help you.”

How Will might cave in another world, one he could imagine just weeks ago, crying and shaking and begging for their help. “Chilton wants to put me on antipsychotics,” he said,

jarring Alana from her line of thought. “Court order pending.”

Hannibal did look displeased at that, his mouth drawn in a line. Interesting. *You like me just the way you are, don't you?* Truthfully, Will *was* a bit psychotic, and he knew it. His imagination had always bordered on the edge, even without the encephalitis.

“Do you want to discuss medication?” Alana asked, skeptically.

“What do you think we should talk about?” Will shot back.

“You are lucid,” Hannibal said. “But without common ground between our realities, this conversation will go nowhere. We both have to step forward to create stable ground.”

Will caught Alana flick her eyes towards him, as if she didn’t want to be caught looking. Maybe she wasn’t just evaluating Will. “It’s a bit late for couples therapy,” Will told Alana. “You want me to tell Dr. Lecter how I feel?”

“I would consider any conversation between the two of you to be a victory.” Alana gave him a tight-lipped smile.

Hannibal stepped closer to the cage, and Alana stayed put. She was definitely watching Hannibal as closely as she was Will. That tiny flicker of solidarity wasn’t enough, but it was something, and Will held it close, crossing his arms over his chest as if he could protect that wisp of hope in the pocket of his sternum.

“I miss our conversations,” Hannibal said. “There's so much I wish we could say to each other.”

“It's difficult to describe the extent of betrayal,” Will said, swallowing against the synchronicity of their feelings. “My body, my mind, my life. I've lost control of so much.”

“I've broken my promises to you.”

“And to Abigail,” Will snarled. “Don't you dare forget Abigail.”

“I haven't.”

“Is regret part of your emotional repertoire? Doubt?”

“You’ve given me reason to feel both.”

“But you don’t. There’s not a moment you look back at and see as a mistake. Not even when you were telling me to cut myself.”

They both bristled at that. Alana held onto her tension, whereas Hannibal let it slip away. Will raised his eyebrows at him, goading. *You don’t like to lie. Let’s see you dance your way around this one.*

“I tried to give you a method of containing your self destruction,” Hannibal admitted. “I made risky decisions, and we both bled for them.”

“I’ve lost my freedom. I’ve lost *everything* .”

“I imagine it doesn't feel fair that I don’t share in your consequences. After all, you put yourself in your hands.”

“You *dropped* me.” Will’s voice choked around the words, and he reached for something to wound, thinking of cracks of gold in pottery. “Like dropping a vase, just to see how it will break.”

Will could just barely hear Hannibal’s intake of breath. “I want to know if the pieces will ever come together again,” he said, as quiet as a confession.

“They won’t. There is no world imaginable in which the shards will come pick themselves up. You want to talk about mourning? I’m crushing every piece you left in me into a fine dust and tossing it in the sea.”

“Is there no part of our relationship that is redeemable to you now?” Behind the somber words, Hannibal was looking at him the same way he did when Will had struggled -- delighted by his defiance, ready to take him by the back of his neck and push him under.

“Not one piece.” Will leaned his head back and looked up at the top of his cage, and the color started draining out of his vision. “I think that’s enough, don’t you?” Then, quietly. “Just leave me.”

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“Mr. Graham?”

Matthew Brown had pulled up the chair to the gurney, and was resting with his arms crossed on the gurney and his head on his arms, looking up the length of Mr. Graham’s body and waiting for him to come out of his stupor. The drugs and hypnosis were obviously a bad combination for him, the things Dr. Chilton made him see and say causing a deep disassociation that Matthew was familiar with. It was the sort of blankness he had seen patients slip into and never really come out of.

Matthew had already undone the restraints, but Mr. Graham was just lying there with a half-lidded gaze directed at the ceiling. Matthew didn’t like seeing him this way. Mr. Graham was brilliant. Matthew reached out and touched Will’s leg, low, near the ankle, not wanting to startle him but needing to give him some comfort.

“Can you walk, Mr. Graham? It’s time to get you back to your room.” Matthew pushed up and looked for a sign of life in Will’s face, hand still on his shin. After several long moments, Will nodded.

Matthew stood up to help Mr. Graham sit up, an arm around his shoulders. He got him vertical, but Will stayed there slumped over his outstretched legs. His hair was growing long,

and it fell in front of his face. Matthew shaked him lightly. “C’mon, let’s get you on your feet.”

Matthew went to brush the hair out of Will’s face, but he suddenly caught Matthew’s hand, staring down at it. “Mr. Graham?” Matthew wasn’t worried. He was fairly sure he could wrestle Will down if they came to blows. Matthew worked out every week and regularly practiced take-downs; so it was with interest that he watched Will consider his hand, like it was something Will had misplaced. Matthew’s hands were bigger than his, though Mr. Graham’s were calloused and roughed up. Matthew could imagine how they looked around a hunting knife, or putting fishing hooks through skin -- sure and confident.

Mr. Graham straightened up, and without looking at Matthew, maneuvered his hand so it was around his neck. Matthew gasped and his eyes went wide as he felt the warm skin of Will’s throat against his palm, and the slow pulse of his heart. Will pushed his hand, goading him to squeeze. “Wh-what are you doing?” Matthew asked.

Will tilted his head back, bumping Matthew’s arm. He looked up at Matthew with that same blank expression, not really seeing him, not really caring even as he was putting his life in Matthew’s hands. His face was so close that Matthew could feel his breath on his chin, until he couldn't. “It’s alright,” Matthew said with a grin, squeezing slowly on Will’s neck. “You need this, don’t you?” He squeezed until Will’s mouth popped open. The sides of his neck were as hard as rock.

Will’s eyes finally focused on Matthew’s. He didn't need to say it. Matthew knew exactly what he was begging for.

Matthew slammed Mr. Graham back down on the gurney by his neck, swinging one knee up so he could pin all of his weight on the man’s neck. Mr. Graham jolted back into himself, letting out a sweet, choked moan of relief. Matthew was careful not to crush his trachea, hand right up under his jaw, watching closely as his face filled with blood and his gasps failed to bring in air. His legs kicked out and he grabbed Matthew’s arm, struggling but not exactly trying to stop him.

“I'm not going to kill you,” Matthew said, feeling Will’s pulse throb and elevate under his hand. “You know that.”

Will dug his nails into Matthew’s forearm. He looked beautiful like this.

Matthew eased the pressure off of Will’s neck until his hand was just resting there, and Will gasped for breath, eyes closed and whole body lax. Matthew slid his hand down so he could feel his chest rise and fall. For a moment, Will looked pained, catching his breath.

“Mr. Graham?”

Will’s eyes opened. He nodded.

Matthew helped him up again, this time fully to his feet. Will seemed unsteady, and Matthew didn't want to let him go. So he guided Will’s hands behind his back to handcuff, then

wrapped his arms around him. “See? That wasn't so bad. You just tell me what you need, you'll see, I’ll help you out.”

“Let’s go now,” Will said hoarsely.

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The forest was dark and filled with smoke, but not aflame. The fires were contained to small disks, scattered between the roots of trees and knots in the bark. Black mirrors, polished and burning. The reflection they made too hot to be contained. Will pushed through the thick clouds obscuring his way, stumbling to trunk of a tree where he tried to catch his breath and find clear air below the smoke line.

Something wet dripped on his head and back. Will looked up to see a form looming above him -- a body wrapped in barbed wire like a cocoon, hanging from it’s left leg.

"Obsidian," Hannibal had said. "In mesoamerica the Aztecs used obsidian as mirrors. They had a deity whose name translates to 'smoke mirror' or obsidian: Tezcatlipoca.”

"What's he the god of?"

"Among many things, the night sky, hurricanes, discord, temptation, beauty, and war."

A low sound thrummed through the forest -- a deep, distorted wail, the tormented vibration of hair on steel cable, taut and sonorous. Pluck, pluck, pluck. The drop of water from a loose tap. Logs crackling in the fire. Hooves crushing the ground into ash.

Will was choking now, lungs filling with soot, burning. He fell to his knees at the base of the tree and pressed his face into the dirt and damp leaves. The ground was cold, and he dug as if he could make a hole to hide himself in and breathe. He just needed one breath that wasn’t stained. One minute of relief from the burning, toxic woods.

Dirt smeared on his face, eyes watering, Will shuddered and raised his head -- and in the ashen loam before him were two jet black cloven hooves. *The black mirror is not good to look into; it does not make one appear good.* Coughing, Will followed them up the digitigrade legs, strangely delicate, to the humanoid form that haunted his nightmares. Skin like opaque obsidian, faintly shimmering in the fire, stretched thin over bones and sinewy muscles. Ribs jutting out above a collapsed abdomen. Spoked antlers arching up to the sky. The wendigo looked down at him like a cat watching a wounded bird.

When someone uses such a mirror, from it is to be seen a distorted mouth, swollen eyelids, thick lips.

“No -- please --” Will gasped out.

The wendigo bent down and grabbed Will's hair in it's massive claw, dragging him through the dirt behind it. Will scratched at the hand, screaming and trying to find his footing, get up, fight -- with a tug, his vision went white with pain. The wendigo lifted Will off his feet, and he scrambled to pull himself up on the claw before his scalp was torn off, but it just looked at him, examining its prey's futile struggle. It's face was in the shape of a man's but immobile, like a mask. It tossed Will into the mud.

Will tried to crawl forward, down the bank and to the water, as he choked on ash. The wendigo crawled over him in an instant, taking his neck in its huge hand and pushing his face into the mud. Claws like knives ripped down his back and his screams were swallowed by the mud. The pain was everywhere, burning down to his bones as the creature tore into him, flaying his skin, blood and dirt and tar. Mud bubbled around his face as he fought to get to air, his clothes quickly shredded to tatters. He dug his hands in the mud, trying to pull himself away, searching for a weapon, something -- the Wendigo just dragged him back beneath it, tugging his clothes away, or was that his skin? It felt like he was on fire and his cuts were bright as the sun, blood blossoming over his back.

I impale my own ankle on the meat hook, between the fibularis longus muscle and fibula.

The wendigo grabbed his legs and spread them out wide, and Will screamed in rage. His hand closed around a shard of glass and he twisted, stabbing the creature again and again, cutting his own hand open and not caring, adrenaline making the pain a blur, savagely snapping at the monster and kicking and screaming. It barely flinched. Will went for its eyes. Tear the mask from its face, tear it off, his hands slipping on blood. The wendigo held him by the jaw and bent to smother him in a kiss.

"Being a slab of meat has some appeal."

"Maybe I should get a meat hook to hang you upon."

Will fought and kicked and bit and tore, but even when it's slippery black lips were ragged from his teeth the wendigo just pressed its tongue inside his mouth, filling him with ichor. Will thrashed himself useless against it but the monster did not care. It gnawed at his mouth, pushing the ichor down his throat with its tongue. He felt it all the way to his stomach, slick warm tar, filling him up. Changing him. Frustration. Pounding his fists against its bony chest. Grabbing it's antlers and screaming, feral, into its mouth. Overflowing from his cuts and mouth and nose with the nightmare slime.

It wasn't killing him. It clawed down his chest, opening him up to reveal something inside, the pain making his limbs weak. *No, no, don't.* Sliding between his legs and lowering its distorted form on Will, pinning him. Smearing blood and tar down his body, down between his legs. Will shook the antlers with every last bit of strength he had, and then --

He couldn't struggle anymore.

He was so *tired* .

"I'm going to fuck you until you scream."

The tar was working through his veins, making his limbs heavy, and he might have been laughing hysterically or crying but there was no way to tell, mud, blood, tar bubbling in his mouth, choking around it and swallowing more down. The wendigo pushed a thick finger inside of him, and that was it: he was gone. He was meat. He could finally be done. *Maybe if I get Hannah to rape me I can break and never come back. Never let Hannibal get to me. He would be so fucking angry. Maybe I should just die.*

Hannibal was seated just inside of him, hissing with the raw tightness then groaning obscenely. His hand pressed on the back of Will's neck and he sunk in a few more inches, the friction drawing another scream from Will. "You feel so good like this," Hannibal muttered, sinking deeper. "My Will. Mine."

But he wasn't just a body. There was something inside of him, vicious and hungry, all sharp edges and black as the night, reflecting, becoming. The wendigo pried him open, making him. Fucking him. Cutting him. What was the difference anymore? Will was coated in the black ichor, not an inch of his skin remaining. They looked the same in the ashen bank of the river, two creatures of shadow and violence, writhing against each other. The wendigo reached into him for the shards, tearing him open, and, god, it felt transcendent. It felt good. *It feels good to hurt bad people.* It felt good to hurt himself. Punishment. Salvation.

The wendigo sunk into him. The barriers between them were sliding away, Will’s skin hardening into black glass. The desires to hurt and be hurt were held edge to edge, mirrored, confused -- and the cut between the polished shards opened, a widening maw swallowing the difference between them.

Will stared up at the stone ceiling of his cell, his heartbeat distant. He raised his hand above to look, and though he didn’t see the cloying darkness obscuring himself, he felt the slick poison all over his body and deep inside of himself. He was stained, permanently.

Will held his hand aloft until the limb was numb and no longer felt like his own.

Chapter End Notes

cw: rape fantasies, violent sex fantasies, mild suicidal ideation, non-graphic descriptions of child mutilation (case), so much internalized shame and victim-blaming always.

The Trial

Chapter Summary

It was the end of the day and everyone was exhausted. The courtroom seemed to pick up, however, when Hannibal swept down the aisle, accompanied by a susurrus echo of rumors and observations. The courtroom was theater, and Hannibal excelled in his role, standing primly with his hand raised to swear in. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth under pains and penalties of perjury? "Yes, I do." His voice captivated the room.

For a moment, all Will could see was the drawn, obsidian face of the wendigo sprouting from Hannibal's pristine suit. So help him, God.

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The trial begins. Hannibal takes the stand.

Chapter Notes

hmm I was kind of struggling with the trial scenes because it's not what I'm really interested in for this fic, so I rushed through them. hope they're alright! um. I'm REALLY excited for the next two chapter so get excited.

there is barely any attention paid to a murder in this chapter, and no twisted nightmare sex, I'm sorry. (still trying to have most chapters contain murder and/or sex. its my philosophy.) next time, however..... :)

thanks for reading! say hi on tumblr!

The remaining weeks before the trial passed quickly, marked by a series of what felt like failures. He met with Alana and the lawyer she had found for him, Leonard Brauer, a man he barely tolerated who at least had as little patience for bullshit as Will did. They crafted his unconsciousness defense without much participation from Will. Alana had, of course, not managed to shake Will of his 'delusion', but that would serve his insanity defense well enough. Preparing for the stand was frustrating, as Will couldn't stomach attempting to make himself seem more sympathetic for the jury.

"Shave for the trial," his lawyer told him. "You'll look younger."

Will thought he looked vulnerable enough already.

He refused to take the antipsychotics that Chilton prescribed him, but if he was still in the BSHCI after the trial, he had no doubt Chilton would get the court order to forcibly medicate him.

Hannah didn't give him an inch on Hannibal.

Her sister, Elliot Reid, finally wrote Will back, and said in no uncertain terms that the next time she would see Hannah was for her funeral.

Will was escorted into court for the arraignment and plea hearing. Not guilty. No deal made. A court date was set. The trips were so exhausting that Will could do nothing but lie on his cot for the remainder of the day.

“You need to keep up your strength,” Matthew said, frowning at Will’s half-eaten meal tray as he collected it from the slot.

“It's fine,” Will said hoarsely. Everything tasted like ash these days.

Matthew frowned, and said like he always did, *Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Graham?* Will dismissed him. He didn't want to look too closely at his own motivations for indulging Matthew in his power fantasies; for indulging in his own fantasies. Will was trying not to imagine the grim satisfaction of Hannibal pulling down his jumpsuit to see that someone else had marked him with bruises, how he would growl in the back of his throat or turn cold, and Will would grab him by the jaw and laugh into his mouth until his teeth shattered from the sound of all that damn glass crunching together between Will’s ribs.

Will’s lawyer rented him a suit for the trial, and as Will put it on he couldn't help but feel that Hannibal was going through the very same motions -- buttoning up the shirt; tucking it into the pants (Hannibal’s would fit his slim waist perfectly, while Will’s were barely staying up); laying the tie under the collar. Will wondered which suit Hannibal would wear -- but of course, Hannibal probably had a new suit made for the occasion. Will honestly knew too much about that serial killer’s wardrobe.

It was happening more frequently -- that Will would be staring down at his food tray or splashing his face with water, and could feel Hannibal performing a similar act miles away. He could feel him moving throughout the space, just doing normal, daily things, synchronous with Will. Sometimes they started thinking about the same things, and that lead to some of their ‘conversations’. Maybe Will *was* delusional. Did a delusion ever feel like a delusion? Or was it only in retrospect, that he would understand these beliefs to be profoundly irrational?

These experiences felt like something *known,* an irrefutable truth burned into his bones. Will felt Hannibal adjust his waistcoat in the mirror, and if he just reached a bit further, he could see it too.

Hannibal was being fussy with the cuffs of his sleeves. “It's an important day,” he said, sweeping his hair into place, focused on his reflection and not Will. “The appearances that we make on the stage today will impress the jury, shaping the story all the way to the final act.”

Will leaned against the bathroom doorframe, rubbing his jaw. He had shaved. “I'm really exhausted by appearances.”

“I sent you your suit.”

“*You* bought it for me. I told Alana to burn it.”

Tsk. Hannibal glanced at Will, amused. “I suppose we don't want you looking too handsome.”

“I'm not at risk for being mistaken as a charming psychopath. On the other hand…” He gestured at Hannibal.

Hannibal turned and judged Will’s suit with a faint turn of his lips. “I look forward to seeing you today regardless. I knew you wouldn't wear it, but it was a gift, hence it is your possession to do with as you please.”

“I don't really have belongings anymore.”

Hannibal looked at him softly, no longer fidgeting with his clothes. It wasn't the acute, skin-piercing stare he sometimes leveled, though he was still observing. Musing. “You don't have to be angry with me in this place," he said, sounding intrigued. "It reminds me of the time we spent together, before.”

“Yeah.” Will frowned at the floor. “I imagine you as the man I thought I knew, not…”

“As a monster?”

“I imagine that, too.”

“Have you neatly disassembled me into parts you understand? The facade, here; the true monster, there?”

“No.” Will swallowed hard. It wasn't difficult to look at the Hannibal he imagined; in fact, it was comforting. The discomfort came from hating the fact that he took comfort from this. “You know that. I'm chronically inept at categorization.” To his own ears he sounded miserable.

Hannibal sighed, and smiled. “You never did take the easy way.”

“Meaning?”

Hannibal walked towards him, stopping close, and adjusted Will's tie. Will raised his brows, but didn't stop him or flinch away. "Even now, you could completely misunderstand me," Hannibal said, "Paint all my actions as inhumane cruelty." He dropped his hands, but didn't step back. "Pretend I only told you lies."

Will laughed. It was the most absurd thing he had ever heard Hannibal say. Hannibal looked affronted.

"You're a fucking idiot," Will said after the bark of laughter. He reached forward and tugged Hannibal's tie askew, watching his blank and confused reaction. "You're a murderer and a cannibal. You could have treated me like a prince and it wouldn't matter. You're not redeemable."

Hannibal loosened his tie, and began to re-knot it, lashes over the smiling darkness of his eyes.

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Will was escorted into court. Everything was soft and distant around him, like he was submerged in water, sensations muffled to a lower frequency. He didn't look at anyone, and when he was seated next to his lawyer he only had to tolerate the judge, lawyers, and bailiff lingering in his peripheral vision. He knew Alana was there, a few rows behind him; he knew the room was packed. But it felt like just himself and Hannibal were floating through the fog.

Will could feel Hannibal cross his legs. The shift of the muscles in his neck as he watched the prosecution make her opening statement. The way he smiled, just with his eyes, when she argued that Will Graham was the smartest man in the room.

"He's an eideteker," Marion Vega said. "He has a remarkable visual memory. He is keenly insightful to the human condition and I would argue, the smartest person in this room. Capable of creating a psychological profile of a different kind of killer, one that would become his alibi."

Close, my dear, but no cigar. It was an eloquent statement, and as the defense had expected, made to paint Will as an intelligent psychopath who had duped the FBI.

Will's lawyer, Leonard Brauer, gave a statement that was similarly brief and punctuated, spoken with almost arrogant conviction. *You will see that Mr. Graham was not in his right mind, and lacks the ability to comprehend what the evidence suggests he has done.*

The prosecution brought up Jack Crawford as their first witness. This was the supposed to be the moment where Jack would sink him to protect his career and the FBI, and he looked dull and spoke in an exhausted voice.

“Six horrendous murders,” Marion Vega was saying. “Over forty different pieces of forensic and physical evidence.” She gestured to the long table covered with bagged evidence. “That tell us Will Graham knows how to think like a killer because he is one. Rather than being tormented by the work he did, Will Graham enjoyed the cover his role at the FBI gave him to commit his terrible crimes.”

Jack Crawford’s pause made Will glance up, catching the heavy distaste that weighed down his face. “I don't believe that to be true,” he said, nearly interrupting Vega, and Will felt the shock travel through the lawyer.

“Agent Crawford?”

“Will hated every second of the work,” Jack went in to say. “Didn't fake that. He hated it and I kept making him do it.”

Don't blame yourself too much, Jack, Will thought with ill humor.

“Why then, when you gave him the opportunity to quit, did he refuse?”

“Because he was saving lives,” Jack said, firmly. Then, quieter. “I was warned by more than one person if I pushed Will, I would break him. I put checks and balances in place, then ignored them. And here we are.”

Will’s lawyer smiled.

With one hand, Will wanted to hold the moment of solidarity close to his chest. With the other, he wanted to crush it, and any hope that Jack or Alana or anyone would save him.

Then there was the evidence, and Brauer ceased smiling.

Even though Beverly, Price, and Zeller had processed the evidence and had worked the Copycat murders from the beginning, none of them were called to court to explain the evidence. Maybe it was just because the prosecution wanted a crime scene specialist who had no personal relationship with Will, or maybe they had all refused. Bev and Price were in the back of the hall, and at some point during the proceedings, Bev left. Probably she had seen enough, or as much as she could tolerate.

The crime scene specialist walked the court through three of the murders before the hall started suffocating under the weight of evidence, and the judge called for a recess. Hannibal was loving it -- his latest works paraded before a captivated audience, and not a speck of evidence coming back to him. Only, that also meant that the evidence that actually implicated Will was conspicuously circumstantial, a garnish tossed on the plate. Yes, they had found trophies from all the kills in Will’s collection of fishing lures, but not a shred of evidence at the crime scenes, besides the last one. *I was a flawless killer until I completely lost my self control?* Hannibal’s testimony of how he witnessed Will kill Abigail would be the only piece of non-circumstantial evidence, and Will had no idea what he would say.

Will honestly didn't know which one of them had killed her.

There was just enough evidence to implicate Will. If Hannibal wanted to, he could have smothered the scenes with Will's DNA, but that would be inelegant, and would have resulted in Will being discovered before he could turn Hannibal into a vessel for the violence brewing in his inflamed brain. And, maybe, he didn't want Will to take the credit for the murders to his grave.

Since Hannibal was not pressing charges for Will's battery, the prosecution had to dance around that evidence. Of course, it didn't matter to the jury that Will's attack on Hannibal wasn't directly connected to the other murders; all the prosecution needed to do was show Will's capacity for brutal violence, and everything else would fall neatly into place.

The recess ended. The prosecution walked the court through the murder of Will's surrogate and Dr. Sutcliffe. And then they came to Abigail. Will stared at her photograph on the projector screen as the prosecution lawyer told her 'story' and showed pictures of the crime scene. Abigail's hair. Her blood, splattered in an arterial arc over the antlers. Her skin, under Will's nails. The scratches she had left on Will's arms.

Will's lawyer made sure, at every turn, to point out that Abigail's body was never found and therefore, they could not know she was dead, but it sounded like petty critiques of the prosecution's story. All Vega had to say was that Will had been obsessed with Garret Jacob Hobbs and had finished the murder he started.

At the end of the day, Brauer opened an envelope and out fell a bloody coil of barbed wire and a human tongue.

"I think I got your mail," he said faintly to Will.

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"You have an admirer," Beverly said, standing outside of Will's cell. "Again."

"I've always had an admirer," Will replied.

She sighed. "Hannibal came in to consult. He practically sang the song of your innocence. There might be another killer, all that." She smirked. "Zeller hates the idea."

"Yeah, well, he hates me. So, the team is considering my innocence?" Will asked.

Beverly shrugged. "Considering? Yeah, sure." She bit her lip. "Not sure I buy… your suspicions. Hannibal really seemed like he wanted to believe you weren't a killer."

"He's playing us," Will said plainly. "Whether or not he sent the tongue."

“You don’t think he sent it?” she asked incredulously. “Changing your story, too?”

“No. But I don’t know why he would send it. I’m not sure it’s his style.”

The next day, the prosecution brought up Freddie Lounds, which was a complete dud. Brauer tore her down with two sentences, as good as striking her testimony from the record.

Chilton talked himself up as an unbiased source on Will Graham's mind, and then dodged around an actual evaluation by saying that Will had the ability to dupe doctors, specialists, and the BAU. He did admit that, during the time at the BSHCI, Will showed signs of delusion and psychosis.

"Will Graham has a rare and dangerous mind," Chilton said loftily. "In my professional opinion, he is confused regarding his actions, and has deeply repressed the memories of his murders. The degree of his psychological break is unique, and selective."

"Then, in your opinion, was Will conscious of his actions?"

"It is my opinion that when Will Graham came to my hospital, he was not conscious of what he had done. He is not your typical remorseless psychopath. But what he is, is something we have not had the opportunity to study before."

Then, it was time for Hannibal to take the stand.

It was the end of the day and everyone was exhausted. The courtroom seemed to pick up, however, when Hannibal swept down the aisle, accompanied by a susurrus echo of rumors and observations. The courtroom was theater, and Hannibal excelled in his role, standing primly with his hand raised to swear in. *Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth under pains and penalties of perjury?* “Yes, I do.” His voice captivated the room.

For a moment, all Will could see was the drawn, obsidian face of the wendigo sprouting from Hannibal’s pristine suit. So help him, God.

“How did you know Will Graham?”

“We met in the fall of last year. Jack Crawford asked for my assistance in profiling a killer who would become known as the Minnesota Shrike, Garrett Jacob Hobbs. I was with Will when he found Hobbs and shot him in the line of duty, saving his daughter Abigail Hobbs.”

“That's how you met Will Graham. How did your relationship progress?”

“We became friends, and then lovers,” Hannibal said, just like that. “I also served as his psychiatrist in an unofficial capacity.”

Next to him, Will’s lawyer was making furious notes.

“Would you say you know Mr. Graham well?”

“Yes, I would.”

“And you were witness to what the defense is calling his ‘progression of illness’?”

“Yes, very much so.”

“Do you believe that Mr. Graham has the capacity to commit acts of brutal violence like those presented here today?”

Hannibal paused. “The evidence certainly suggests so.”

“It's a yes or no question.”

“Then, yes.”

“Was Mr. Graham ever violent towards you in your relationship?”

Will stared into the middle distance, Hannibal and Vega floating in his vision. He kept his reactions submerged, thinking of his hands around Hannibal’s neck and the bruises, thinking of wrapping barbed wire around Hannibal's arms and naked body, and felt nauseous.

“No,” Hannibal said. “Up until his last episode, he never harmed me.”

“Up until he tried to murder you--”

“Objection,” Brauer called out, annoyed. “Speculation, and relevance?”

“Will Graham’s capacity for violence is extremely relevant to this case,” Vega shot back.

The judge held up his hand to quiet them, and brought the lawyers up to his stand for a quiet and tense conversation. Will chanced a look up at Hannibal -- he was staring at the marble floor below, listening to the hushed conversation and, to Will, obviously annoyed.

The objection was sustained, and the prosecution continued their questioning.

“So, to clarify: up until Will Graham attacked you, he was never violent towards you.”

“That’s correct.”

“You never feared for your safety?”

“No.”

Will could sense the trap of her argument, and Hannibal looked wary as well.

“So,” Vega said, turning to speak to the jury as well, “All of a sudden, without warning, Will Graham snapped and murdered Abigail Hobbs. You were with the two of them at the time. Are you telling us that up until that moment, Will Graham gave you no reason to fear for the safety of yourself and Abigail?”

“What I have said,” Hannibal clarified, “is that Will was never violent towards me, or gave me reason to fear for my safety. If that were not the case, I would not have brought Abigail and Will together.”

“Is it possible that Mr. Graham tricked you into a false sense of security?”

“I do not believe that to be the case.”

“Whose idea was it to take Abigail back to her father’s hunting cabin?”

A pause. “It was Will’s idea.”

Satisfied, Vega changed her line of questioning. “Please tell the court what you witnessed of Abigail’s murder.”

Hannibal took a moment to compose himself, straightening his already perfect pose in the chair. “I left Abigail and Will alone in the cabin for a short time to make a phone call. It was not long, maybe 15 minutes. When I came inside, I heard what sounded like a struggle from upstairs. I rushed up to the antler room, and found that Will had subdued Abigail with a knife to her throat.”

Will let his gaze unfocus, imagining the story that Hannibal told -- Abigail wide eyed with fear, Will soaking in sweat and trembling, half out of his mind.

“Will yelled at me to turn around and put my hands on the wall. He seemed very deranged. I tried to talk him down, but I very much feared for Abigail’s life, so I eventually complied and turned by back on them.”

“Will, listen to me,” Hannibal might have said, hands raised like he was calming a feral hound. “You don’t have to do this. Let Abigail go.”

“You don’t -- you don’t see! Turn around! Don’t -- don’t look at me!”

Will felt cold. So, so cold.

“I couldn’t tell what was happening behind me,” Hannibal continued, almost reverent. “But I tried to calm him down. I failed to do so. The next thing I knew, there was a sharp pain to the side of my head, and I fell unconscious.”

It would have been an awkward maneuver, holding Abigail hostage and subduing Hannibal as well. Will doubted that was what really happened. *Will, swaying on his feet, eyes rolled to the back of his head; and Abigail, looking with confusion and fear towards Hannibal.*

“When I returned to consciousness, I was tied up," Hannibal said. "Abigail was gone. But there was blood, unmistakably. I am not sure what happened to her during that span of time. I attempted to ask Will what happened, and calm him down, but he did not seem to hear me. He was obviously suffering an acute mental breakdown.”

“Although you were not conscious for her death, you witnessed Mr. Graham threatening Abigail Hobb’s life.”

“Yes.”

“Is there any doubt, in your mind, that Will Graham killed Abigail Hobbs?”

“Of course I have my doubts," Hannibal said, putting on a veneer of sorrow. "It is very difficult to believe that someone we care about is capable of such violence.”

Brauer picked Hannibal apart on the stand. If Hannibal was testifying as a victim, the jury would probably not have been able to stomach it; but as it were, Hannibal was not going to speak about the way Will had attacked him. Under Brauer’s questioning, Hannibal yielded easily to the fact that he was biased when it came to Will Graham, and that his evaluation of Will’s mental health should be considered with that bias in mind. But Will’s lawyer didn’t trash Hannibal’s credibility as a witness like he had Freddie, instead bringing doubts to the jury’s mind and then coaxing Hannibal to say, with conviction, that he believed Will had not been aware of his actions, and would never, in his right mind, hurt another person in that way.

“Will Graham has a remarkably strong sense of morality,” Hannibal explained. “He was acutely distressed by the idea of hurting others.”

Hannibal didn’t say that he was acutely distressed by *the idea that he might hurt others if he wasn’t in control of himself.* That would have been more accurate. Besides his recounting of the events around Abigail’s death, that statement was the most he had lied on the stand. Will could hear the way he composed his responses to tell as few outright lies as he could, playing a game of honesty to mock the sanctum of the court. *Yes, I swear to tell the truth, but now that you’ve got me on the stand, you aren’t asking the right questions.*

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Will felt a world apart. The trial was too much to handle, and at the same time it didn’t seem to matter at all. Will could imagine in vivid color how he would be executed by poison gas, or electrocuted in the chair, like he was in the adjacent room pulling the switch. The outcome of the trial could kill him, and Will couldn't care.

He and Hannibal existed in another reality that no one could touch. Alana, Jack, and Beverly -- the world of forensics and law and order -- was no longer one that he occupied. The knowledge that Hannibal Lecter was the Chesapeake Ripper cut through the universe, and Will was caught on the wrong side. Until someone believed him, he would be isolated by what he knew far more than the bars on his cell. And even if he could prove that Hannibal was guilty, would the others even understand?

Could they see?

Ever since they had met, Hannibal Lecter had done everything in his power to become the only one Will could rely on to understand him. Will was lost outside of him.

The trial the next day was suspended. A body had been found on the courthouse steps in the early morning.

Beverly came to tell Will that it had been an homage to his alleged kills. Mounted on a stag's head, wrapped in barbed wire, skewered with fishing hooks, etc.

"So?" she asked, as Will looked at the photographs. "Is it the Copycat?"

Will honestly didn't think so. "Any surgical trophies?"

"Besides the tongue that got delivered to you? No."

Will slid the photo back to her on the tray between his bars. "The Copycat doesn't do repeat performances like this. The surgery technique is his signature. If that's not there, it's not him."

She sighed, like she already knew this. "C'mon, Will. You say you've been set up and then something like this comes around -- and you say it's not the Copycat?" She gave a frustrated huff. "Jack is going to appeal to the judge because of this!"

"Why did you come, Beverly?" Will asked, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Jack certainly doesn't know you're here."

"Yeah. You got me." Her face fell, and her voice wavered. "I'm trying to figure out if you're guilty. I haven't -- I don't know right from wrong or up from down anymore." She glared at him. "It's fucking annoying, Will."

"Fibers don't care about right or wrong," Will said. "Or up or down."

"Yeah." Beverly blinked, and looked down the hall towards the exit -- and freedom. "Thanks. I know I'm being selfish. If you don't want me to come --" She frowned. "Well, I guess you'll have to fucking deal with it."

"You should probably give up on me," Will joked, praying for the exact opposite.

The Victim

Chapter Summary

A soft sound of impact, like a sandbag slipping to the ground. “Hey, now --” Will heard Matthew say. “Ms. Reid, are you alright?”

Will lay absolutely still so that no shifting of cloth on the bare mattress would interfere with his hearing. His heart was in his throat.

It happened so fast.

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Someone dies in Block B.

Chapter Notes

blares horn this chapter is AWFUL and not at all erotic. (well, maybe the Will / Matthew stuff is for a second.) bad bad things happen. please avail yourself of the content warnings and read safely. I'M SORRY.

cw: rape (not Hannibal or Will); dubious kink / self harm. there is very minimal descriptions of the assault, but it is there, and it's not okay, and I'm not making it erotic.

in case you forgot, because it was not discussed a ton, the Marionette Murderer used to rape her murder victims. she is a very bad, deeply disturbed person. I love her, but I also consider her irredeemable. Hannibal, on the other hand, is a sadistic cannibal who loves fine wine, murder, and all extremes of experience, and is too delighted by the hell she brings in the world to condemn her for rape (which, imo, Hannibal typically finds banal and crude). this is all to say that I know that I'm a terrible sinner for writing this shit, and I hope you can trust me to bring you through it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was thinking about revenge.

Within the domain of revenge, there were variances in equity, righteousness, and satisfaction. If Will went down the path of repaying Hannibal what he had dealt to Will, he would find the evidence to expose Hannibal's crimes and let him rot in the BSHCI. For good measure he could disgrace Hannibal by publicizing his personal life, and letting Freddie Lounds get her claws all over his belongings. Keep Hannibal from the comforts he would request in the hospital -- books, paper and pencil for drawing. The food would be enough to drive Hannibal mad, let alone the smell of this place.

But that wouldn't be enough. Hannibal deserved to hurt, and Will wanted to hurt him. Killing him wouldn't be enough. If Will slit his throat, he would be free, but left to grapple with all the unanswered questions and hypotheticals. Hannibal would haunt his mind unless he found a way to cut him out entirely like the cancer that he was. Will wanted to drag out his suffering, keep him caged, cut him and beat him and leave him without sunlight. It would feel good to hurt him. It would be satisfying.

But would that be enough? Will might be satisfied, but Hannibal would delight and goad him all the way down the murderous descent -- *That's a good boy, show me how you feel. I always knew you had it in you.* The way to inflict the most pain on Hannibal would not be with blades and fists and rope. No. Will would have to exorcise Hannibal from his mind and shut the door in Hannibal's face. Tell him that he wasn't important to Will, and that Will was no longer his mirror, and then leave -- find someplace no one could find him, fix boat motors, and drink the rest of his life away.

If Will had to claw out most of himself in the process, he would.

Alana and Hannibal had come to talk about the possibility of changing his defense, and Will had no room left to humor the act. Hannibal was speaking animatedly, clearly enthusiastic about the possibility that Will was innocent; and Alana was warning Will that if he changed his unconsciousness defense he wouldn't be able to resume that route; and Will was just so fucking tired. He looked straight up, suddenly breathing erratically as he resisted the urge to smash his head on the table. Both Alana and Hannibal stilled in shock.

“Get out,” Will hissed through clenched teeth. “Hannibal. Get the fuck out.”

The quiet violence in his voice convinced them. Hannibal exited the room. Will put his head in his hands, trembling violently. Alana didn't speak.

“How are my dogs?” Will asked eventually, miserable.

“They're well,” Alana said kindly. “Winston keeps running away to your house. I think he's looking for you.”

Will shuddered. “I found him at the beginning of all of this. He's been with me the whole time.”

“I've got them all at my place now. It's pretty busy, but they're all such good dogs. Hannibal is helping me find good homes--”

“Alana.” Will sobbed, hiding his face. “Don't let Hannibal near my dogs. Do you hear me? I don't want him ever touching my dogs.”

Will started crying, clawing at his hair. It was messy, uncontrolled, as he struggled to breathe, pleading, “Don't let him touch my dogs.”

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Matthew Brown loitered outside of the private interview room, ready to escort Mr. Graham back to his cell when the session was over. He stood a polite distance away, leaning against the wall and swinging the tassel of his white scrubs in a lazy circle. Dr. Lecter had exited first, alone, and Matthew stole a quick glance at him, but he was good at keeping his head down and making himself smaller so that people paid him no mind. Dr. Lecter didn't look at him, just waiting with his hands folded. Matthew checked his pager a few times, but nothing was going amiss in the hospital.

A quarter of an hour passed before Dr. Bloom left the interview room, fingers to her lips. Dr. Lecter went immediately to her hunched figure and put a hand on her shoulder to escort her down the hall. Matthew heard her sob, and with their backs turned to him, he took the opportunity to really look. *So that's the Chesapeake Ripper, huh?* Matthew fished out his keys, eyeing the way Dr. Lecter comforted Dr. Bloom as they walked.

Matthew entered the interview room, closing the door behind him. Will knew that it locked automatically. For a moment he was still, hunched over the table with his face in his hands, and he willed his emotions to drain out.

“Are you ready to go, Mr. Graham?” Matthew asked.

“No.” Will wiped at his eyes and scrubbed his face. “I'm not --” He snapped his teeth, and dropped his hands to the table, handcuffs and chain rattling. “Hurt me,” he said, savagely, tilting his head to Matthew but not looking at him. “Someplace no one will see.”

Matthew stepped forward, eyes wide. “Are you sure?”

“Do it.”

Matthew was very calm as he unhooked Will’s handcuffs from the table, and secured them again behind his back. Matthew stood behind him and undid the front of his jumpsuit, shucking it down his arms until his back was exposed. Then, Matthew shoved him down into the table so he was bent in half.

“I'll take care of you,” Matthew said, trailing a hand down Will’s spine. Will screwed up his face, trying to hide in the crook of his shoulder. His body was tense as a coil waiting to

spring. Matthew held his key ring in the palm of his hand, a key poised between forefinger and thumb.

Matthew put his hand over Will's mouth, and dragged a key down the meat of his back.

Will screamed into his palm, the pain piercing bright and clear through the fog of his mind, real and true and alive. The key tore a ragged scratch across his back, and Matthew didn't hesitate before doing so again, carving an arc from the side of his ribs down across his spine.

Will cried out.

He hurt.

Blood beaded unevenly on his skin.

He heard Matthew's excited, ragged breath above him, and hoped that he wouldn't stop; that when Will reached the edge of what he could endure and began to struggle, Matthew would beat him from within an inch of his life; and Will would be wheeled into court and everyone would see how broken he was -- Alana, Jack, Beverly, and fucking Hannibal would be able to see what was slowly killing him; and Will would laugh, and laugh. Do you see, now? *You think I'm insane? You don't know how goddamned sane I am.*

Will's back was laced with bloody ribbons when Matthew did stop, watching Will tremble over the table for long minutes before he helped Will stand upright and pulled his jumpsuit up over his bloody back. Will's head ticked to the side, his jaw moving oddly, and when Matthew finished buttoning up the jumpsuit, he held Will gently in his arms.

"Better?" Matthew asked.

Will nodded. He stood limply for a minute, then straightened his back. Matthew let go of him.

Will made towards the door, but Matthew stopped him, and looked down into his face. Gradually, like pulling weights, Will looked back. "Did you like my gift?" Matthew whispered, eyes bright and too wide.

"I saw a photograph," Will deflected.

"I wanted to finish what you started." The way he spoke was reverent, adoring. "The next one, you'll see. We can finish it together."

Will couldn't think, so he became what Matthew saw in him, and a smile grew glacially on his drawn face, exactly the way that Hannibal would smile. He even spoke with Hannibal's cadence, lips sliding around words that emerged from a half-lost mire in his mind. "I liked your gift very much, Matthew."

Matthew escorted Will back to his cell, and Will didn't notice that Hannah Reid was out of hers.

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The rest of the day slipped into night with no input from the daylight, just the slight adjustment of lighting in the cavernous cells of block B, leaving dim illumination above their beds so the cameras could always watch them. Will spent a while laying on his back, feeling the deep scratches ache and burn. It was an awful coping mechanism, and even worse for engaging in it with a sadistic killer, but it wasn't as if Will had anything else. All doors were closed to him, save a few stretching down dark hallways away from him, his depressed mind tunneling in on those slivers of possibility. Violence, caged tightly between his teeth.

Will waded into the river, and filled his mind with thoughts of fishing. Hooking the lures on the line, scanning the water for locations fish would gather, leading out the line, casting it with two strokes, flicking his wrist to launch the lure at his aim.

He imagined how he would teach Abigail the steps, getting her deep into the stream and letting the gentle flow cover the ripples of their movements. Going over each step, the pieces he knew so well, the simplicity of it. She would smile brighter out in the daylight, mock Will for his waders, and cry out in delight when she succeeded in the cast. Then, they would wait together, and she would probably get bored as Will prattled on about the kinds of fish and how the time of day changed conditions for fishing.

Will turned his head into the pillow, away from the lights, and Hannibal guided it back with a firm hand on his jaw. "You keep rejecting me, Will," he hissed. "But the harder you resist me, the stronger I become. I claw at the walls of my cage."

Will flinched. The light on the surface of the moving water was flashing too brightly, like a strobe light, like --

Will emerged from his imaginings to the sound of the buzzer at the end of the hall, opening the door. He tensed for a moment, on edge because something didn't feel right. After lights 'out', it was rare for anyone to come into the hall. Will relaxed somewhat, though, upon hearing Matthew's familiar saunter and the jangle of his keys swinging around his finger. "Alright Ms. Reid," Matthew said, two cells away, quietly but clear enough to hear in the muffled silence that often descended on the hall. "Here we are. Now you make sure to get a good night's rest."

Hannah's response was too muffled to hear over the clang of keys unlocking the cell door. Will stared up at the water stained bricks. Maybe Matthew would come to his cell, and then maybe Will would tell him to finish what Will started. If Hannibal were dead --

A soft sound of impact, like a sandbag slipping to the ground. "Hey, now --" Will heard Matthew say. "Ms. Reid, are you alright?"

Will lay absolutely still so that no shifting of cloth on the bare mattress would interfere with his hearing. His heart was in his throat.

It happened so fast.

Matthew let out a shocked “unf” like all the air was punched out of him, shouted in anger, and then a monstrous clang filled the hall as the cell door slammed, metal against metal.

“Matthew!” Will called, jumping to his feet. He was at the bars of his cell, trying to look down the hall and seeing nothing. “Are you alright?” But there was, unmistakably, the sound of a struggle. A heavy crack. Feet slipping on the floor, and the soft grunting of choking. “HANNAH!” Will shouted, shaking against the bars. “Hannah, LET HIM GO!”

He heard a breathless, delighted laugh from her, amongst the grunting of the struggle. The sound of a body hitting the floor. Miggs started laughing.

The patients were staggered on both side of the hall so that they couldn't see each other. Will went to the far side of his bars, and saw a sliver of Migg’s cell, his gnarled, wrinkled hands resting outside the bars. “Got a toy, girlie?” Miggs called out. “Why don't you let me out so we can both have some fun, hmm?”

“Shut up, Miggs!” Will hissed, unable to hear what was happening over his cajoling. “Hannah. HANNAH!”

She didn't respond to either of them. Will heard the sound of cloth being torn along the grain, once, twice. Nebulous shifting sounds. Matthew groaning, then coughing. The clang of keys and the loud click of handcuffs locking.

“Come here, girlie! Come give Miggs a kiss.”

Dread burned cold through Will, making his throat tight, and he couldn't hear what was happening over the god damned beating of his heart. He was blind, desperate to understand the sounds, which were now reduced to quiet shifting and the tearing of fabric. Long minutes passed, filled with Miggs egging for attention.

A loud slap rang through the hall, then another. Matthew groaned.

“Mr. Graham?!” Matthew called out in a shocked voice.

“Tell me what's happening, Matthew,” Will said clearly, making his voice calm.

“She’s --”

“Ah - ah - ah," Hannah warned.

“You don't want me to talk to him, Hannah? Why don't you and I talk?”

“No kicking, now,” Hannah said, quieter than Matthew who was trying to be heard. Will’s knuckles were white on the bars.

“Oh he’s a feisty one!” Miggs called with a laugh.

Shuffling. Crack. Matthew groaned in pain.

“I just told you.” Slap, slap. “Open up, Matthew.” Will heard what he imagined was her putting a cloth gag into place and tying it tight.

No one was coming, Will realized. He was waiting for the alarms to go off, or the buzzer to sound as security rushed in to help. But Matthew must be the only one on watch for the hall tonight, and he had probably turned off the cameras and sound -- for Will. His stomach lurched.

“Hannah?” he tried, again, forehead resting on the bars. “Will you talk to me, please?”

“If you let them talk,” she muttered, barely audible over the sound of more fabric tearing, “they think they can negotiate with you. But this isn't a matter of negotiation, Matthew.” Thud. Matthew's groan, smothered by fabric. “Mr. Graham knows what's going to happen to you. He knows very well.”

“Please, Hannah,” Will said. “You’ll end up in solitary, with no one to talk to. Are you sure you want to be that alone?”

“So you’ll talk to him but not me, huh girlie?”

The cell door creaked, and Hannah walked along the hall. “Hey, Miggs?” She stopped just out of sight, and Miggs pressed his face up against the bars. Will could see her shadow stretching along the ground.

“Ah, there's a pretty face. Why don't you come in here and I'll show you a real good time.”

“Would you mind keeping it down? If you're very quiet, maybe I'll give you a treat.”

“Ah, you're a crazy bitch.”

The shadow shifted, and Hannah opened the front of her jumpsuit. “Ah, fuck, you're so tiny,” Miggs said.

“Now be quiet, and go masturbate on your cot or whatever,” Hannah said sweetly. “Then I can show you more, alright?”

“Fuck, girlie.”

“Are you really regressing, Hannah?” Will asked, trying to goad her away from Matthew. He saw the shadow take a hesitant step. “I thought you were beyond all this.”

“I'll be with you in a sec, Will,” Hannah said conversationally. “Give me, oh… ten minutes?”

“Don't kill him.”

“Oh, that was never on the agenda.”

Will could hear her smiling. He felt like he was frozen over. Hannah began to walk back to her cell, to Matthew, who was no doubt restrained. In flashes Will remembered the cold case files he had poured through, men tied up with improvisational restraints in motel rooms. Men who had solicited her for sex, made to bleed, and raped with objects.

“Hannibal finds it repulsive.”

Her footsteps halted.

“There's nothing he finds uglier, more rude, than sexual assault,” Will said, desperate to stop her. He didn't even know if it was true. “He would be disappointed in you.”

Hannah walked towards him, coming into sight under the dim light of the hall. Shadows fell across her sunken face and the knobby bones of her clavicle and sternum where the jumpsuit was still unbuttoned. She had the kind of face that was all at odd angles, with a nose that had set badly after a break, and too-wide eyes. Coupled with her eating disorder, she looked more like a skeleton than a woman. There were a few dabs of blood on her jumpsuit, and the ring of keys was in her fist. She came to a stop, well away from Will, and raised her thin eyebrows. “Is that so?” she asked mockingly. “Because you know him so well, hmm?”

“I know you want his approval,” Will said in a low voice. She sneered. “This is beneath you, Hannah. Do you want him to know how far you've fallen?”

“I bet Dr. Lecter diddled you in your sleep.” Hannah grinned, eyes blazing. “You're kinda sexy when you're seizing, and he had his hands all over you. And you're telling me he’d admonish me for my fun? Hah.”

Will kept his face frozen, and suppressed the shudder that threatened to tear him down to shaking. He needed to buy time. “You didn't see his face when I told him about your amateaur kills.”

Hannah’s mouth twitched, and then she took a deep breath. “Should I kill him instead, hmm? You think that would be *better*?” She spat out the last word. “You think it's better to just die?”

“Hannah--”

“Let’s make this interesting, shall we?”

Will closed his mouth. Hannah’s narrow, hollow eyes roamed over him, her head tilting far to one side as she considered his limbs and bone white knuckles clenching around the bars. She walked a step to one side, coming closer to the cell, and then shifted to the other side, looking from Will to the bars to the concrete floor of the hall. She took a few steps away from him towards the opposite wall, and licked her chapped lips which pulled into a trembling grin. Will could see her pulse throbbing quickly in her neck beneath thin skin. When she held out her arm, fully extended, with the keys in hand, Will realized that she had been measuring the space.

She dropped the keys, and they landed a good five feet from his bars, the metallic clanging like a roar.

“Think of it like a counterweight,” Hannah said, giving Will one last look. “Good luck, Mr. Graham.” And with that, she walked back down the hall towards her cell and Matthew.

Will watched her go for a moment, stunned. Then there was no room for thought or observation.

Will dropped to his stomach on the floor and reached as far as he could through the bars towards the ring of keys, shoving his shoulder through the bars as far as it would go and fingers scrambling against the concrete. The keys were too far away. He got up and looked around the cell for a wild moment, then began to undo the buttons of his jumpsuit with trembling fingers. Hastily, he stripped out of it, and tied the trouser legs together into a knot at the end, to give it weight, before twisting the garment into a coil.

Will condensed into pure instinct. There was no function to process the noises coming from down the hall or calculate or analyze his actions, no corner in his mind to hide from what was happening. He felt what he could hear was happening to Matthew in his own body, stomach heated with a noxious poison, salivating with the weight of gagged moans and fearful exhalations. Will crouched at the bars with his jumpsuit in his hands like a thick rope. He tried to throw one end of it in an arc towards the keys, and missed. He pulled the jumpsuit back, twisting it again, and threw. The knotted end hit the keys and jolted them a few inches. He reached out as far as he could and pulled at the fabric, but it slipped over the keys without much effect. Then he took both ends of the coil in his hands, stretching out far, and hooked the fabric over the keys. Slowly, he dragged the jumpsuit back towards him, pulling the keys against the floor. The fabric slipped. Again, again, he tossed his line until the keys were in reach, and then shoved his arm forward, fingers inches away, stretching, straining with every muscle in his body. He felt metal against his fingertips and grunted, shuddering. Fingers grasped the ring and then he was on his feet, flipping through the keys in search for the one to his cell, bending his arm around the bars to unlock his cell.

Garment in one hand and ring dangling around his wrist, Will stepped out of his cell in boxers and socks, and ran down the hall.

Everything slowed down.

Matthew was just inside Hannah’s cell, slumped against the bars where he was handcuffed and tied with strips from his white uniform, gagged, mottled bruises over his face and blood on his chest. Hannah was crouched over him, one hand roughly tugging Matthew’s penis and the other between his legs.

Will’s heart did not race.

He threw open the cell door, stepped inside, and kicked Hannah in the ribs. She went flying to the side. Will fell on top of her, twisting her arm behind her back with a sickening crack. He got his elbow around her throat and hauled them both to standing. Hannah cut his arm with something and Will slammed her against the wall. A scalpel dropped to the floor. Will caught both of her hands behind her back, arm still around her throat. She fought like a wild animal, seizing and twisting in his arms, but Will had her held tightly.

He hauled her down the hall, threw her into his cell, and locked the door.

Hannah looked up at him from the ground, gasping for air, and started to laugh. She rolled on her back, clutching her stomach as laughter tore through her, making her back arc and tears stream down her face. “Yes, YES!” she screamed hysterically between choked laughter. “WILL! Look at you! HAHA -- god! You did it! AH! You saved him! Hahahah!!!”

Will went back to Hannah’s cell and crouched before Matthew. He blinked at Will furiously, eyes wide and glassy. Will pulled the gag out of his mouth.

“Ahh, hah--” Matthew panted heavily, mouth hanging open. “M-Mr. Graham.”

“It’s alright now,” Will said, hearing the words as though someone else was saying them very far away. “It’s over. You’re safe.” Will looked him over for injuries. He was in shock, but that didn't necessarily mean there was lethal wound. Matthew was bleeding profusely from one of his calves, and had a long cut across his clavicle. Hannah had forced his pager into his rectum.

Will took a deep breath. “Matthew, I’m going to undo your restraints, and then you can remove this, okay?”

“She -- she didn’t--” Matthew swallowed, looking confused. “I’m alright, she didn’t hurt me too bad. She got the jump on me. I didn’t -- I wasn’t paying attention. She choked me with the handcuffs. I don’t know --”

“Breathe, Matthew. Can you do that for me?” Will reached up and unlocked the handcuffs, but Matthew’s arms were still tied to the bars with strips of cloth. Will looked around and picked up the fallen scalpel.

The alarm started blaring.

Will ignored the sound and cut Matthew’s arms free, then started to work on the ties on his ankles. Blood pumped sluggishly from the wound on his calf, soaking what remained of his white uniform trousers. “Mr. Graham,” Matthew said weakly. “You have to get away from me.”

“I’m getting you free,” Will said, and heard that his voice was shaking.

The buzzer sounded at the end of the hall as the door was opened.

“No, Mr. Graham, please --”

Footsteps. Will cut away the last restraints. Matthew put his hands on his shoulders and tried to shove him off. Another man shouted in anger. Will looked up in time to see Richie in the doorway of the cell, and then he was tackled to the ground.

Richie punched Will in the face, and he was stunned. Another blow came, then another. The room was throbbing around him, pressure on his chest from where he was pinned. Will was vaguely aware of Matthew shouting and struggling to his feet, but another blow sent his head ringing. He tasted blood. The sharp clarity from moments before was dissolving into shadows

and breath and struggle. His fist tightened on the scalpel and he swung it wildly at the form above him.

• • • • • • • • • •

Hannibal was enjoying a glass of amaretto in his study when his cell rang. Being as late as it was, it was unlikely to be a social call, either a patient with an emergency or something more interesting. He set the glass of amber, bitter liquor neatly on a coaster, and slid the phone from his pocket. The caller ID told him it was Jack Crawford, which meant all sorts of budding possibilities.

“Hello, Jack,” Hannibal said pleasantly.

“Hannibal.” Jack’s voice was gruff, all urgent business, and surely would be followed by the words ‘there has been another body’. However, Hannibal was surprised when Jack said, “We have a problem. Will Graham is missing.”

Hannibal beamed, but kept the pleasure from his voice. “I see.”

Jack sighed. “I wanted to let you know, and to offer you protection. There is a very real possibility that he will come to you.”

“Protection won’t be necessary, Jack,” Hannibal replied, running his finger on the lip of the glass. Possibilities blooming, indeed.

“I disagree.”

“I appreciate your concern, Jack,” Hannibal said, “But I take my freedom very seriously. I cannot abide protective custody.”

“I may have to put a watch outside you house,” Jack admitted.

It was just like Uncle Jack to present an order as an offer, and, when refused, simple do what he thought best. The alternative was the brutish authoritarianism Hannibal had witnessed during Jack's weaker moments. Hannibal stood, and walked over to the window, parting the curtains to look out upon the street. It would be a remarkable coincidence to find Will stalking up on his residence at that moment. Alas, the street was quiet. Hannibal had no doubt that Will would come to him, but it appeared that he had to be patient.

“If I may inquire, how did Will escape?” Hannibal asked, putting concern in his voice that he did not feel.

“We’re… not sure,” Jack said tensely. “He may have had help. To be honest, it’s a mess at the hospital. We’re still processing the scene.”

Interesting. Hannibal wondered how many had died in exchange for Will's freedom. "Can I be of assistance?"

Jack hesitated. Hannibal took his pause as a sign that he was figuring out how to dissuade Hannibal from coming, despite the fact that he was desperate for the help, so Hannibal walked to the foyer and took his coat from the closet. "Before we know what happened, I'm trying to keep attention off this," Jack said.

"Have you ever known me to be indiscreet?"

"No. No, you're right."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Thank you, Hannibal." Jack gave a frustrated sigh, and hung up.

Hannibal slipped his phone back into his pocket. He pulled on his coat and stood in front of the small mirror by the door, checking his appearance, and smiling broadly. This was more exciting news than the body left on the court steps yesterday morning. Before leaving, he stood beneath the staircase and placed a hand on the bannister. "My dear," Hannibal called up the stairs, "I'll be gone for several hours. Don't wait up for me."

He waited for a moment, and heard a door opening. His guest stood at the top of the stairs. "What's happening?"

"Nothing to be concerned over," he said. "Our friend Will has left the hospital prematurely. If he comes here while I am gone, would you please make him feel welcome?"

"He's coming here?"

"Anything is possible, my dear," Hannibal said fondly.

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Hannibal strolled up to the Baltimore State Hospital of the Criminally Insane, and it was indeed a chaotic scene. The street had been sectioned off, and police were positioned around the building. A policewoman at the entrance radioed Jack when Hannibal requested entrance as, apparently, she had not been informed of his arrival. She gave him directions to the crime scene.

Hannibal took his time through the hospital. It was a labyrinthine old building, and he considered the possibility that Will was hiding somewhere inside. Hannibal was not a security expert, but nonetheless he had taken the opportunity during his visits to familiarize himself with the security systems and protocols of the hospital. Dr. Chilton had boasted about the hospital's air-tight security and impressive record; but Hannibal had also spoken with a few orderlies and knew that they were desperately understaffed.

Hannibal had already decided how he would subvert the security system of the hospital, although he did not image it would be necessary. He was looking forward to seeing what Will had managed.

Jack greeted Hannibal outside of Will's cell block, just as as number of CSI's were exiting the block. Hannibal could hear Zeller and Price bickering from beyond before the heavy door swung shut. "Thank you for coming," Jack said, placing a hand on Hannibal's elbow.

"How can I be of help?" Hannibal asked.

"I'll let the team catch you up," Jack said, nodding towards the hall. "This entire hospital is an active crime scene, so don't go anywhere alone. I need to oversee the interviews."

"Of course."

A police officer buzzed Hannibal into the hall. He stood for a moment and simply observed the space before him -- the stone hallway stretching before him into darkness where it dead-ended. It was a miserable place to keep patients. He smelled blood, luminol, and latex amongst the usual scents of fecal matter, piss, mold, and bleach that he had come to associate with this hall. A few evidence markers were on the ground next to spots of blood. It appeared that all of the patients had already been escorted out.

Hannibal walked towards Hannah Reid's cell, where Zeller, Price, Katz, and a dead body were crowded. "Oh, Dr. Lecter!" Price said enthusiastically, squatting near the bars with an evidence collection bag.

"Just what we need," Zeller mumbled sarcastically, examining the body on the floor. "One more cook in the kitchen!"

"What do you need?" Hannibal asked, standing outside the cell with his hands behind his back.

"More time," Zeller replied.

"Witnesses who aren't legally insane assholes?" Price suggested.

"A competent tech who can find some damn footage," Katz said. Her arms were crossed over her chest, and she did not look entirely pleased that Hannibal was here. "Boys, I'm going to take the fabric scraps out into the hall so I can have an inch to work in."

"Thank god," Zeller said.

Beverly Katz exited the cell and walked over to an equipment bag. "Help me lay this out?" she asked, turning to Hannibal with a folded plastic tarp. Hannibal put on a pair of gloves, and together they laid out the tarp across half of the hall's width. "Thanks," she said with a heavy sigh, rolling her neck. "We're in the thick of piecing together what happened."

"That's the Marionette Murderer's cell," Hannibal said.

Katz nodded. “Yup. Victim is Carl Richie, one of the orderlies. Reid, on the other hand, was found locked in Will Graham’s cell. When they finally realized that something was wrong.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. “Interesting.”

“Uh, huh.” Katz went into the cell and pulled out pieces of torn, bloody white fabric, one by one, and started spreading them across the tarp. Hannibal let her complete the task herself while they talked, not wanting to get in the way. “Everyone else was in their proper cells. We already processed Reid. Blood on her, on whatever this is supposed to be, in the cell, in the hall.”

Hannibal looked at the body in the cell. He was wearing a torn and bloody white uniform, though he was shirtless beneath the coat. His neck had been snapped. It was unclear where the blood had come from.

“The patients are giving conflicting stories,” Price explained, stretching his legs. “The ones that are talking. The guard who was on duty was Matthew Brown, who is also missing.”

“Damn,” Zeller said over his shoulder. “The blood on these clothes doesn't seem to match the stab wound. Well, not all of the blood.”

“Two bleeders?” Price asked.

“Sure seems that way.”

“It’s not Reid’s,” Katz said as she finished bringing out the shredded scraps of fabric. “She didn’t have any cuts on her. Pretty banged up, though.”

Hannibal squatted besides her as she examined the fabric. After a moment, she pointed to the edge of the fabric. “This is part of the uniform. It has been torn along the seam. They were all torn that way. This one was *also* cut by something sharp. We found a scalpel.”

“The fabric been knotted,” Hannibal observed.

Katz nodded. “But our victim hasn’t been tied up at all. Nothing has been.”

“Hannah Reid has a propensity for restraints,” Hannibal said.

“So does Will.”

Hannibal nodded. Katz looked away for a moment, biting her lip, and seemingly distracted by an errant thought. “Is it possible to get prints from fabric?” he asked, bringing her focus back to the evidence.

“We have to look for bloody fingerprints.”

Together, they combed the fabric, finding only a few partial bloody fingerprints. They took several samples of the blood, and from a piece that was damp with something colorless. Hannibal held it under his nose and sniffed. “Saliva, I would guess,” he said, before swabbing what remained of the fluid.

“I don’t understand,” Katz said, shaking her head. “Someone tore, tied up, and cut this fabric, possibly using it to restrain someone, or, I don’t know, apply a tourniquet? As preparation for a display?”

“The victim wasn’t displayed,” Hannibal said. “A tourniquet is a possibility, though if it was cut away we would see the evidence of bleeding out.”

“This guy didn’t get a tourniquet,” Zeller said.

“Uh oh. We missed something under the bed." Price groaned, rubbing his neck from where he was crouched by the cot. "I'm too old for this, Zeller, would you mind?"

"I'm a little busy!"

"You know I have the knees of a geriatric."

After the photographer had been called over, they removed the object and brought it out to the tarp. It was a pager. “There’s something on it,” Zeller said, screwing up his nose. “It smells foul.”

“Blood and feces,” Hannibal said.

They all looked at it for a moment.

“Reid used to object rape her victims,” Katz said. “Not that she confessed to any of those, but Graham…” Her words trailed off. "Graham was sure they were hers."

Zeller groaned in annoyance and went back into the cell. “I’ll check our vic.”

“Take me out to dinner first,” Price said, shaking his head. “Sorry,” he added, more to Hannibal than Katz.

“So Brown brings Reid in to her cell from the medical ward,” Katz said, brainstorming. “Brown’s distress signal goes off at some point, and Richie comes to check in on the hall. Notices that the security cameras and sound are out. Richie goes in, gets got, Brown and Graham vanish, and Reid ends up in Graham’s cell.”

“A chaotic moment could have provided Will with the opportunity to escape,” Hannibal said, “Especially if he had help.”

“Cut security feed certainly suggests that Brown was up to something,” Katz added.

“No rectal tearing on the vic,” Zeller called from the cell.

“Graham, Reid, Brown -- maybe they were all in on it,” Katz suggested. “This amount of obfuscation is buying Graham a lot of time.”

“Three’s a crowd,” Price told her.

“Will either left with an accomplice, with a hostage, or as one,” Hannibal said, musing over the pieces. “If we determine which, we can anticipate how he is traveling, and where he might be.”

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The interview room was likewise crowded with FBI, police officers, hospital staff members, and the patients who had been put into the cages. It was quite noisy, the voices echoing in the large space, which might have annoyed Hannibal had it not also provided much needed cover. He approached Jack, who was in the middle of a tense conversation with an agent.

“No one is leaving until you find something on those tapes,” Jack said angrily. He spotted Hannibal and waved him over, roughly dismissing the agent. “Tell me something I don’t already know.”

“I wish I could, with certainty,” Hannibal said. “Has Ms. Reid already been interviewed?”

“She hasn’t said a word.” Jack grimaced. “And we’ve both seen her do the silent act.”

“Perhaps I could try to speak with her,” Hannibal offered. “I am very familiar with her case. If we don’t understand what happened here, we may not be able to locate Will.”

“Meaning?”

“I am not convinced that Will left the hospital of his own volition,” Hannibal said. “It is likely that either he or Mr. Brown were injured before they disappeared, if not both. In the time it would take a lab to match blood to DNA, we could already have a first person account of what happened.”

“If you think you can get her to talk, then by all means,” Jack said.

Hannibal stood in front of Hannah’s cage and appraised her. A heavy bruise was blooming on her forehead, making her already uneven face appear more distorted, there was dried blood under her nose, and her hand hovered protectively over her ribs. Immediately, her eyes snapped to his, and she seemed to come awake from a distant stupor.

“Hello Ms. Reid,” Hannibal said politely, as if they had never met before. “My name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. I was with Will Graham when he discovered your last crime scene.”

She licked her lips. “What did you think?” she asked.

With the noise in the hall, they were not a great risk to be overheard. Hannibal maintained awareness of the other people moving throughout the room in case they came within hearing

distance, and stepped closer to her cage. “It was a marvelous achievement of engineering and imagination,” he told her with a smile. “You truly outdid yourself.”

“You saved one of mine.” She spoke quietly, her lips barely moving.

“Saving a life can be just as thrilling as taking one.”

Her eyes went wide at that, looking for the first time in their acquaintance like she was going to cry. “Saving someone? He’s still going to die.”

“That is the nature of the game,” Hannibal said. “Where you experience meaninglessness, I create meaning.”

“Will said you would be disgusted.” Her face dropped, miserably. “That you would be disappointed, if I raped him.”

Hannibal was reasonably certain that she meant Matthew Brown, but he nonetheless felt a possessive and violent urge stir in his chest. “Who, Hannah?”

She looked at him, aghast. “I would never touch what’s yours. You know that. Matthew." She paused. "You got my messages, didn't you?"

"Yes. They have been invaluable to me." Hannah was referring to their coded correspondence. With the amount of mail she received, it was easy to write to her without fear, and she had decoded Hannibal's letters quickly.

"I didn't think you would like how close Matthew and Will are getting," Hannah said in a low voice. “So I thought I'd shake things up."

“And I am grateful for your shaking. Would you tell me what happened?”

“That’s what I'm here for, isn’t it? Well. I saw the opportunity to have a little fun with Matthew,” she said, looking quite exhausted. “I gave Will an opportunity to save him, and he did. Good for them. For a moment I thought Will would kill me.” She looked wistful. “But then he just put me in his cell. Too busy helping Matthew to kill me, I guess.” Hannah held up her hand and mimed pressing a button with her thumb. “Then I rang Matthew’s emergency signal. Sounds like Richie came in and he thought *Will* had done what I did to Matthew, and started beating the shit out of him.”

She put her pinkie in her mouth and started to gnaw at the nail. “Then one of them killed Richie, and they skedaddled. That’s the story.”

“Thank you, Hannah.”

“So are you? Disgusted.”

She looked quite vulnerable and young, as though the girl she once was had grown crookedly into weathered skin. She had not been nourished by life, and though she had tremendous skill and creativity as a killer, she was slowly being consumed by her own suffering. Hannibal regretted that she had been caught, even if it was ultimately her own decision. Perhaps he

would speak with Dr. Chilton about treating her. “When something repulses me, I remove it from my life,” he explained. “You do not disgust me, Hannah.”

The sun was rising when Hannibal left the hospital, dawn light breaking clear across the scattered clouds and tinting the sky a lovely shade. He felt quite awake. Hannibal had felt that it was approaching the time for Will's stay at the hospital to come to an end, and the serendipity of the universe solidified his resolve that Will should no longer be so isolated from him. Hannibal was endlessly curious about what was happening inside Will's mind, but the past few months had not provided him with many opportunities to observe his specimen. Now, Will was somewhere out in the world, able to breathe air not dampened with the stagnant oppression of the hospital; to be able to gaze upon the sky as a mass stretching in every direction, endless and shifting with the inevitable alchemy of time and weather. Will had incubated and stewed in his isolation, and now he should be released upon the world without any restraints. It would be better, however, if he were out in the world alone. Matthew Brown was one element too many in the churning, elemental chaos. Well. Not knowing was alway part of the fun.

Smiling contentedly, Hannibal breathed in the beautiful morning and descended the steps, out of the cage and into a world that now contained one Will Graham.

Chapter End Notes

(again, I'm sorry)

but we're finally out of the hospital, and that means that we're about to have a lot of fun c:

The Shed

Chapter Summary

Matthew takes Will on a vacation.

Chapter Notes

I'm terrifically sorry for the late update - illness and business have been keeping me away. anyway, here we are, the moment before everything goes to shit.

your comments give me life. thank you for sticking with this story! come say hi on tumblr!

It was much too difficult for Will to open his eyes. Black pressure surrounded his skull, spotted with ambient reds, bruised colors filtered through the thin skin of his eyelids. Disoriented, Will blinked one eye open, the other swollen shut. Bright sunlight glared at him from behind dark shapes, all odd angles. He drifted back into unconsciousness.

When Will awoke again, he identified that he was laying in the back of a car. The bright light came through the windshield. He blinked his one eye, and tried to focus through the swimming visuals. Matthew was driving. Will ached all over and had a crippling headache that stabbed the back of his skull with every pulse of his heart.

“You're awake,” Matthew said, looking at Will through the rear view mirror. The luminous sliver of his face blurred. Everything was too bright, too loud.

“What happened?” Will tried to say, the words coming out rough. His mouth was incredibly dry.

“Getting you out of that place, Mr. Graham,” Matthew said. “You don't belong in there.”

Will wasn't sure if Matthew meant that he was innocent, or sane, or something else altogether. He breathed deeply, and assessed his situation.

He felt like he had been hit by a car. The right side of his face was swollen badly, and the rest of him didn't feel much better. The nausea, headache, and light sensitivity were alarming, possibly indicators of a concussion. Experimentally, he moved his head to one side, which was a mistake -- a wave of nausea rolled over him, taking away his vision.

When it passed, Will looked down his body and noticed that his hands and feet were bound with zip ties. He was covered in a grey wool blanket, but just in his boxers and undershirt beneath that, as he had been when he broke free of his cell to stop Hannah. His socks were sticky with drying blood. Will lowered his feet from the seat to the floor of the car, each movement straining his muscles, and rubbed his socks back and forth against the carpet. If they ditched the car, someone might notice the blood. It was a long shot, though, with the blood mostly dried, so Will tried to wriggle off one of the socks to hide under the seat. His ankles were bound tightly together, making it difficult to shimmy the sock down. In the pit of his stomach, pain and nausea threatened to overwhelm him again.

“Where are we going?” he asked.

“Somewhere safe,” Matthew replied, “And remote, where we won't be bothered.”

“Is that where you killed the bailiff?”

Matthew paused. They were on a highway no doubt, driving smoothly along, but from this angle Will couldn't make out any landmarks or signs. Sitting up seemed beyond him at this moment. “No,” Matthew replied at last. “The place is well equipped, though, don't you worry.”

Will was worried. The fact that he was bound meant, in the best case scenario, that Matthew wanted Will to be entirely dependent on him, and in the worse case scenario, that he had always planned to keep Will captive and kill him. Will finally got the heel of his sock down, and began painstakingly inching the sock down his foot.

“They’ll be looking for us,” Will said. “Did you cover our trail?”

“You don't need to worry about that, Mr. Graham.”

“I was on the Behavioral Analysis Unit,” Will reminded him. “I know their methods.”

“Hmm.” Matthew considered that for a moment. “No cell phone. We switched cars in Baltimore and this one doesn't come back to me. Not stolen, mind you. And the place we’re going isn't connected to me either. I lived off the grid for a few years, you know.”

“Is Matthew Brown your real name?”

“It is now.”

Will wasn't panicking. He felt awful, but calm, and he would have to stay that way to get out of whatever this was. He shook the sock off his foot, and began to wedge it under the driver’s seat. “Wouldn't be a bad idea to switch cars again,” he mumbled, lifting his feet back into the seat.

They drove on, and Will tried to stay awake, but he was already so exhausted. “Think I have a concussion,” he said as his vision started fading again, but he was unsure if Matthew had heard him.

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The car passed from the highway to country roads, and then seemed to pull off the road entirely. Through the window Will saw the tops of dense oak trees and the grey-blue slab of sky between their boughs. Matthew drove slowly but the bumps in the road made Will's nausea spike, and his vision clouded with floating lights. Finally, the car came to a stop. "We're here," Matthew said, exiting the car. He opened the door by Will's head and helped him sit up, the blanket pooling around his lap.

Will leaned out of the car and vomited. "Sorry," he said through a mouth full of acid. "I think I have a concussion."

Matthew pushed Will's hair out of his eyes, and leaned him back against the seat. He opened the passenger side door and came back with a water bottle, helping Will drink. Will lifted his bound hands to cradle the bottle as he drank greedily, drops sliding down his chin, Matthew watching him like a hawk. He reluctantly gave up the bottle to Will's shaking hands, and Will swilled water around his mouth and spat it out on the dirt. "Thank you," he said groggily.

They were parked in a dirt drive before an old cabin-style house. It occupied the center of the clearing, dense woods surrounding them on all sides. The building was in disrepair, with walls of peeling paint, broken shutters, and a sunken wooden porch, cracked and rotten. There weren't immediate signs of occupation except for a couple of heavy duty black trash bags leaning against the side of the building.

Will looked up at Matthew, who was in little better shape than himself, his gaunt face bruised, dried blood in his hair, and a collar of livid bruises around his neck from where the chain of the handcuffs had choked him. Still, his eyes were bright with excitement and focused to a deadly edge. "Where are we?" Will asked.

"Somewhere safe," Matthew didn't answer, bending to scoop Will up in his arms.

"I can walk," Will complained, though his feet were bound and he wasn't sure if his legs would hold him anyway. Matthew ignored him and picked him up, bridal style, grunting in pain. The blanket trailed down as Matthew carried him past the side of the house, shuffling with a limp. Dizziness swept over Will again, and he tried to blink away the dancing lights to see his surroundings. Overgrown grass and brush, rusted metal and derelict pieces of wood scattered in the yard, a stump lacerated with the rhythmic abuse of an axe, the trill of pine warblers calling to each other in the branches, the sun burning hot against the dirt. They must have driven for at least six hours if the morning sun was any indication, by whether they were in the middle of Pennsylvania or as far south as North Carolina, Will couldn't say. Maybe if he got a better look at some of the vegetation, or better yet, the insect population, he could make an educated guess. Remote, a day trip out from Baltimore, and oak trees. Yeah, that narrowed down his possible locations not one bit.

Instead of taking him inside, Matthew carried Will to a large shed behind the house, nudging the door open with his knee. It was like a separate garage or woodshop, Will noticed, spying work tables and tool racks on one half of the space. Matthew lay him gently down on a bare

mattress on the floor (oh god) and then stood looking down at him, panting from the exertion. “Not everything is ready yet,” Matthew said, almost shyly, and he gave Will a smile. “Ms. Reid sped up our schedule.”

Will sat awkwardly on the mattress, bound hands on his bent knees, and tried to look less helpless than he was. “Why am I bound, Matthew?” he asked.

Matthew frowned, uncomfortable with the question. “I don't want you to leave.”

“I'm not going anywhere,” Will said. “Not that I have anywhere else to go.”

Matthew’s eyes narrowed. “Maybe,” was all he said. He walked across the room to fetch something from one of the shelves, trying to hide his limp.

Matthew was observant. It wouldn't be easy to lie to him, but Will would have to find a way to convince him that hecould be trusted unrestrained.

Will took the opportunity to get a better handle on his surroundings. The workshop was a sturdy old wood building with a fresh concrete floor, which sloped down into a circular drain in the center. The concrete had been hand poured and was rough at some edges, though meticulously smoothed towards the center drain, where water, cleaning fluid, and blood could collect easily. Installed directly around the drain, jutting up and above it, was a u-shaped metal bar. On the ceiling above him was a long rail that supported several meat hooks, which could be moved along the tracks.

The workbenches, saw horses, tools, and miscellania of the shop were pushed to the left side, where Matthew was retrieving a medical kit. Will spotted amongst the clutter a mini fridge and a large band saw. Where he was seated, there were no tools in easy reach, just the mattress, the drain before him, and a long garage freezer against the wall to the right. Across from him, the wall was covered in various coils of hanging chains, rope, and other restraints.

Overall, it was an ominous combination of a woodshop and a butcher’s. Matthew has been building his kill space, and now Will was bound in the center of it.

Matthew returned to sit in front of Will with the medical kit, pulling on a pair of gloves before cleaning Will’s wounds. He brought a finger under Will’s chin to tilt his head, and, burying the impulse to bite his hand, Will turned his face to him obligingly and allowed Matthew to dab the antiseptic over the cuts on his brow, nose, and cheek. Will’s right eye was still swollen shut, and after Matthew was satisfied with the cleanliness of his wounds, he activated a cold pack and had Will hold it to his face.

Will didn't like the way raising both of his hands to hold the ice pack left his abdomen vulnerable.

If he wanted to kill you, he would have done it already, Will reminded himself. But if Matthew wanted him as a kill partner, an equal, he wouldn't have Will restrained. If the chains on the opposite wall were any indication, Will could have far less freedom of movement, and if he made the wrong move and angered Matthew, he would lose his shot at escape.

Matthew lifted his shirt to check the bruises around Will's ribs, and Will grit his teeth in pain at the palpitations. "Can't tell if you have a fracture," Matthew said, dropping the hem of Will's shirt.

Will took a deep breath in and out, expanding his rib cage. It hurt, but if there was a fracture it was probably just a fissure. "I don't remember leaving the hospital," Will said.

"Richie knocked you out cold," Matthew said with a small grin, moving down to examine Will's legs. "I killed him."

Well, that wasn't exactly surprising. Something bothered Will about it, but it was difficult to concentrate and he was missing too many pieces of what happened.

"How did we get out unnoticed?" Will asked, genuinely curious.

"They trust me at the hospital. I've never given them any reason not to. It wasn't too difficult to convince head of security it was all a false alarm, that Richie was helping me get the cameras back online. There are some convenient blind spots in the cameras between block B and the parking lot."

"You've been planning this for a while."

"Mhmm," he hummed in ascent, sitting back and staring keenly at Will.

Realizing what he wanted, Will said, "Thank you."

"I'm going to treat your back now," Matthew said, moving to sit behind him. Will closed his eyes and suppressed a shudder of fear and nausea as Matthew moved out of sight behind him, peeling up his shirt and touching his bare skin. Even through the latex, Will could feel the heat of his hands and the closeness of his body, the deep scratches from the key stinging as fingers traced them. Will hissed in pain, unable to contain the noise as Matthew felt the torn skin of his back, a hitch of admiration in his breath as he caressed the marks.

"How does it look?" Will asked, needing to break the silence.

Matthew's hands stilled on his back. "Beautiful."

Will closed his eyes tightly, and waited for it to be over.

"You should rest," Matthew said decisively once he had finished bandaging Will's back. He finally left his side, and Will breathed a quiet sigh of relief as Matthew went to the other side of the shed. He brought Will a few water bottles from the mini fridge and an armful of blankets.

"So should you," Will ventured.

"Yeah," Matthew said with a small grin. "I'll be sure to do that, thanks. I'll be back in a few hours with some food, alright?"

Will nodded. Even with his throbbing headache, he could tell Matthew was lying.

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Will shuffled around the blankets and laid down on the mattress, considering his options. Matthew had left him in the zip ties, which cut uncomfortably into his wrists and ankles, and served to hinder his movement. He could crawl around with some difficulty, and there were plenty of tools in the shed he could use to cut through the ties. But Matthew wasn't dumb enough to think that Will was securely restrained as he was. He was likely testing him.

Will searched the room with his eyes until they ached and he had to close them. He didn't see any cameras, but there were a few spots that could conceal smaller devices.

If Will gained his trust, he might gain more freedom and have a better shot of escaping. But if Matthew had always planned on keeping him captive, it was only a matter of time before he restrained Will further. Matthew was injured, but Will was worse off until his concussion improved; and though Matthew had looked up to Will and wanted to help him, obsessively so, his obsession was accelerating. In one week, Matthew had killed two people for Will. He had kidnapped Will.

The weight of the situation came crashing down around Will all at once, squeezing around his chest like a vice -- spots of light in his vision, the room spinning, panic like a caged animal throwing itself against the bars.

He was captive.

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When Matthew came back, he looked worse off than before. Not physically so much as emotionally, a tension coiling under the surface and aberrant wildness in his eyes, his manicured words and manners hard and unnatural. He had showered and changed into track pants and a t-shirt, disguising his limp as best he could as he could as he brought Will a sandwich on a plate. “How are you feeling?” Matthew asked, setting the plate on the floor by the mattress.

Will steadied himself, speaking calm and clear as he had prepared to. “Matthew. Remove my restraints.”

Halfway back to standing, Matthew froze, a muscle clenching in his jaw, eyes on Will’s bound feet. It was the same tone Will had used with him before, softly commanding, as if even when institutionalized, Will had the utmost control over his environment. But that had only ever been because Matthew had yielded a small amount of power to Will. Matthew

straightened, a shaky grin passing over his features. “No,” Matthew said, slow, almost considering, “I don't think I will.”

Will chased his eye contact. “I thought we were partners.”

Matthew tilted his head, staring down his nose at Will. “How many people have you killed?”

“One. Maybe two,” Will added, thinking of Abigail. “The jury is still out on the second.”

“You know, I was worried that you weren't what I thought you were,” Matthew said in a slow drawl. “When you started proclaiming your innocence. It's not an act. You really were set up.”

“I've never tried to convince you otherwise.”

“But you could be a killer, couldn't you?” Matthew loomed above him, smile shaking. “You understand us. You can become a hawk like me, Mr. Graham. And then, we’ll be unstoppable.”

“You’re keeping me restrained because you doubt my convictions,” Will said. “This is a poor way of instilling loyalty.”

“I won't risk you leaving,” Matthew said. “Besides -- you need someone to take control, don't you?”

“That's not what this is.”

Matthew frowned. He turned his back on Will and walked to the opposite wall, laden with chains and other restraints. “I'm not trying to hurt you,” Matthew explained, selecting a chain and a pair of metals cuffs from the wall. “I want what's best for us.” He sat down before Will again, a mere twitch of his eye revealing the pain it caused him. He pulled off the lone, bloody sock from Will’s foot and tossed it aside; then drew a switchblade from his pocket. Will kept calm as the blade folded out, as Matthew slotted it between his ankles and cut through the zip tie with ease. There was a raw indentation on Will’s skin where the tie had cut in.

“This will be more comfortable,” Matthew muttered, slipping one cuff around Will’s ankle, and then the other. Though they were metal, they were lined with soft leather padding. Each cuff had their own separate locking mechanism that clicked into place under Matthew’s hands, and he clipped a short length of chain between them with two more locks.

“That is better, thanks,” Will said, though the gratitude was difficult to feign. “Do you feel you have to control me?” Will asked, not hiding his examination of his new restraints. It was nothing he could get out of without the keys or a bolt cutter, but he'd be able to walk.

“This is temporary,” Matthew said, though Will wasn't convinced.

“I want us to be able to trust each other,” Will said.

Matthew grabbed his wrist and cut through the zip tie holding his hands together. “There,” he said, though he didn't let go of Will right away. “I'll show you how serious I am. You show me the same, and we won't need these… precautions.”

Will looked down at where Matthew held his wrist, a soft and overly-familiar touch, thumb pressed in against his pulse and the raw line of skin. “You want me to kill with you.”

Matthew’s lips parted, an intake of breath just shy of awestruck. Though he didn't say it aloud, Will felt the confirmation of his words strung between them, heavy and electric. “Eat,” Matthew said, “You need to rebuild your strength.”

Matthew released Will’s wrist and went to the cluttered side of the shed, busying himself with sorting through the tools. Will picked up the plate and began to eat. Each bite of the sandwich caused the swollen right side of his face to ache, a bruise close to his jaw bone making chewing difficult. The simple act of eating was exhausting, and he couldn't taste anything. Will drank half of a water bottle and stared at his plate like the partially-eaten sandwich was another hurdle to overcome between him and escape.

Would escape even mean freedom? He would just end up back in his cell for the rest of his life or, trial pending, until he was sent to death row.

Matthew looked over him occasionally. Will chewed, slowly, another bite difficult to swallow. A ridge of torn ham hung out, deli cut, pink, and suddenly Will could smell it and taste the lump softening between his molars; and Will hadn't had an appetite for the duration of his stay at the BSHCI, his stomach now half its usual size; and the food had been bland enough that Will didn't really pay it attention; but Hannibal had eaten his trophies. Cooked with them. Fed them to Will. He had known this for weeks and hadn't really thought of it, like he hadn't really thought about his own apathy towards food.

He had to eat. He couldn't let defeatist thoughts make him dull and complacent.

"Atta boy", Will could almost hear Hannibal saying as he dove back into his food.

When his stomach felt full to bursting, Will lay back down on the mattress, exhausted, his face throbbing in pain. He could barely keep his eye open. Matthew brought him another cold pack and Will laid it gratefully over his bruised face. He didn't want to let his guard down, but he could feel himself drifting off to sleep, and he was far too weak to attempt an escape yet.

“Build your strength, bide your time,” Hannibal said in his mind. Will scowled. He didn't want Hannibal’s help, even the phantom version of him whose conversations had always been enlightening, always pertinent and, in a mind constantly warring with himself, strangely with Will’s best interests in mind.

“The simplest solution would be to kill him.”

Not helpful, Will thought. He could imagine Hannibal’s amused look, and as Will started to drift off, he couldn't quite hold onto the questions curling in his mind, syrupy and cloying,

that Matthew and Hannibal wanted him to kill, that he had swapped one captivity for another, and that there was, under his skin, a budding darkness sifting, uncoiling, waiting.

Captivity

Chapter Summary

“Maybe you should be afraid of me,” Matthew said. “It was so easy to kill the bailiff and Richie. Really, it’s kind of amazing how easy it is to kill someone.” With his free hand he made the shape of the gun, pointing it at Will’s stomach. “Bang, one in the guts.” He took another step forward. “And another, in the head, to finish him off. It was nothing. Can you believe it? One moment, they’re there, and the next --” He put his index finger under Will’s chin, miming the shooting of a gun. “Pop. They’re gone.”

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Day two in the shed.

Chapter Notes

thanks for reading! [say hi on tumblr!]

Will woke and slept in fitful starts, sometimes alone, sometimes with Matthew there to refresh his supply of water and food and ice packs.

It was night when Will felt well enough again to sit up, and the dark was achingly thick around him, with so little light to see by that for a moment Will forgot where he was. His disorientation faded as his eyes adjusted to the faint moonlight beyond the shed windows, not bright enough to do more than glow opaquely. The summer night was mild, and Will had plenty of blankets to keep him warm. Winter had ended after all.

He sat up on the mattress and waited for the dizziness to subside. Very slowly, he pushed himself to his feet, using the wall. The blood still rushed out of his head, insufficient salt and sugar in his bloodstream making him feel faint. He leaned against the wall until the feeling passed.

A chorus of crickets and the thick notes of a lone frog animated the night. It had been so long since Will had heard the sounds of the woods and for a moment he could smell Wolftrap -- the warm, dander scent of his dogs, hot and sweet whiskey, and the wet banks of his stream.

What if he could be free?

Will stretched his aching legs, and began to walk around the shed. The chain between his ankles made his steps short and ungainly, the sound of metal dragging against concrete loud in the quiet, his one bare foot growing cold. The swelling in his face had gone down but he still couldn't fully open one eye, which only compounded his difficulty navigating the dark space. He went to the shed door and tested it.

Locked.

Disappointment flooded him.

There was a padlock on the other side. He yanked the door a few times in frustration, then left it be.

Will made a slow circuit of the shed, both testing his strength and becoming more familiar with his surroundings. The windows were similarly locked, but if he busted the glass he could probably slip through. There were tools he could use to undo his restraints, or as weapons. Will wondered what Matthew expected of him; he could be waiting to see if Will would try to escapr. It was possible that there were cameras in the shed but the more Will thought about it, the more his paranoia was soothed. Night vision cameras were expensive, and if they were small enough to be hidden they would be even more costly. Matthew had a pitiful income from his job as an orderly -- though he could have stolen surveillance supplies from the BSHCI. It was more likely that there was a listening device so Matthew could hear if Will was breaking down the door to escape.

Will could stash a weapon under the mattress -- but if he wasn't going to use it immediately, he would risk Matthew finding it. If Matthew felt threatened or betrayed by Will, well. That could be deadly.

He explored the shed in the dark, working by touch more than sight. Above one work table were numerous tools, hanging from hooks in a large pegboard -- wait. Will could just barely see the general arrangement of tools in the wall, which Matthew had organized earlier. He reached out and grabbed a pair of pliers, and the déjà vu was staggering.

They were arranged exactly the way Will’s own tools were kept in his garage.

Will put the pliers back. He had learned to be meticulous in his organization of worktools from his father, humid days spent watching his father bent over a boat motor, handing him what he needed. There hadn't been any excess space for clutter. Everything had to be put back exactly where it was found.

Matthew had been to his house.

He really was building a kill space for the both of them.

Bending cautiously, Will found more supplies stored in rolling cabinets, including a plastic container with compartments of various sizes. It wasn't Will’s own, since his tackle box and all fly fishing supplies were no doubt kept as evidence, but it was undoubtedly for him -- fishing hooks of various weights, spools of plastic wire for tying baubles and feathers to the

flies, a magnifying lenses for precision work, needle nose pliers. Everything he needed to make his fishing flies.

Will wondered if Matthew had been convinced when Will told him that, no, he wasn't the serial killer he was accused of being, but he was still a hunter -- of bigger game.

"Matthew wants for the two of you to kill me, together," Hannibal said in his mind.

Will continued to search, putting everything back where he found it.

"Do you want to kill me?" Hannibal asked.

Basically, Will thought.

"Can you really afford to be dismissive at a time like this? Indecision will cripple you, here."

I'm not a murderer.

"You have killed before, and will soon be in the position to kill again. You may not want to, but you would take a life to preserve your own, would you not? And Matthew has killed two innocents. Wouldn't it feel good to murder him?"

If that's the metric by which I decide, it would feel much better to kill you.

"Then kill us both."

Will found what he was looking for -- a break away box cutter. He opened up the handle to find a bundle of five blades nestled inside.

"You don't want to be the kill partner Matthew desires. When he figures that out, he will kill you."

I know.

"Then: escape, or take the opportunity to dispose of us both."

Will wrapped duct tape around the bottom half of the blades, thick enough to protect his hand somewhat should he use them. He hid one of the blades under the mattress, cutting a pocket in the underside and slipping the blade in. Another, he taped to the bottom of the freezer. The freezer was empty. It was big enough to hold a body, and for a moment Will was tempted to crawl inside and curl up in the freezing dark. Instead, he climbed on top of it to stare out the window above it, which afforded him a view of the edge of the woods, not the house. For a long while, he gripped the edge of the window and stared at the moonlit grass, sunken in his thoughts with no emergent decision or realization.

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The following day, after delivering a plate of breakfast and checking Will's bandages, Matthew led him outside. His captor leaned against the wall of the shed and lit a cigarette, watching as Will shuffled out into the sunlight.

Will stepped out onto the grass on his bare feet, feeling the cool earth, and the sun that burned bright on his skin and hair. It felt so good, despite the aches that wracked his body, and the bruises dark on his face. He tilted his head back and breathed in, soaking in a quality of light he hadn't felt in months. It was a warm day, the wind just cooling his skin when it brushed by, but the thing materials of his boxers and shirt were sufficient. Will stretched his legs, walking around the grass yard in the awkward short steps permitted to him with the chain, just enjoying being outside for the first time since his hospitalization.

He could feel Matthew watching him.

Eventually, Will turned back and regarded Matthew. The situation felt less ominous outside of the shed, like they were on more even ground, and the fact that he was permitting Will certain freedoms boded well. Will walked back towards him, stopping in the sunlight a few feet away and watching Matthew curl his lips around the cigarette.

"You want one?" Matthew asked.

Will shrugged, and nodded. Matthew fished the carton of cigarettes out of the pocket of his sweats and gave one to Will, flicking the lighter on and holding it under Will's cigarette. He sucked until the end was bright. "I don't really smoke," Will said on the first puff, stepping back into the sunlight. "What I really missed was my whiskey." The smoke curled in his lungs, burning hot and filling him with a faint buzz. It had been so long since he'd smoked that he could immediately feel the first tingling effects of nicotine.

Matthew chewed at the butt, lips pulled into a grin. "And the sunlight?"

"And the sunlight."

"It's not right, keeping people cooped up like that," Matthew said, staring off to the distance.

"Some would say we deserve it."

"Inmates in prisons get yard time. Its worse for the max security patients. And even for the others, what get to live out of the room in the ward, there's no end date to their stay. Some of them will never get out, and they're not crazy, they're just unlucky enough to get physicals because the other patients are mad, and that's just -- your whole life, cooped up in one place." Matthew shook his head.

"How long have you been at the BSHCI?" Will asked.

Matthew grinned, thin lips and hooked nose making his face hawkish. "Fifteen fucking months," he cooed. "But I spent some time in one when I was younger. Paid close enough attention to learn to be a good orderly."

There was no way that Chilton would hire an orderly who had been institutionalized before, but Matthew had alluded to a change in identity. That was probably how he slipped through the cracks; that, or a judge wiped his record for good behavior. "Did you come to the hospital to be closer to violent criminals?"

Matthew'a smile was enough confirmation. "It was almost boring until you and Ms. Reid came in. Gideon's the only conversationalist and he's tight-lipped about himself. But two serial killers in one week, oh man --" The excitement bled into his voice. "Better than Christmas. We had bets going, you know, over which one of you would get a physical first. I put my money on you..."

Matthew trailed off, pausing with the cigarette brought to his lips, forgetting it as a far-off look seized him. Everything about his movements which were normally so animated became slow, sluggish. "Damn," he said under his breath, smile strained. "I owe Richie money."

He laughed, forced and faint.

Will felt suddenly cold. Matthew'a ash was growing long, ignored in his strange stillness. “Matthew?” Will asked. “Are you alright?”

For a moment, he was silent, as if the process of the words reaching his ears, and him formulating a response, were arduous. “Fine,” he said, a click in his throat. There was such an obvious disconnect between that word and how Matthew felt that Will’s stomach flipped. "It's just. Funny. She got to me, but Richie can't collect because I killed him."

“You don’t have to be fine,” Will said cautiously. “You went through something traumatic.”

Matthew’s eyes were dull, and the ash fell from the end of his cigarette. He sucked another drag, like an afterthought. “I had hoped that you would attack someone. It was a bad bet -- Ms. Reid was far more likely to be violent. But I saw you, and... I wanted to see you hurt someone." His smile trembled on his face, eyes dull and distant. "When you came in and pulled her off me, the look on your face..." His voice faded again.

He was having a flashback. Will could almost see the memory playing out under his skin, the repetitive grinding of his jaw not just a mannerism but a compulsion, his pulse beating hard in his neck. "Matthew," Will promoted, trying to bring him back.

There was too long a delay before he spoke. "It’s not the first time a patient has tried to kill me,” Matthew said with a shrug. “Honestly, for the Marionette Murderer, I expected worse.”

Will stared, his cigarette forgotten by his side. “She wasn't trying to kill you.”

Matthew tensed. “Hey.” Will stepped forward. “You're here, now, with me. You're safe now.”

Matthew’s eyes widened. “What the fuck is *that* supposed to mean?” he spat.

Shit.

Matthew turned his head to Will, slow and reptilian. “You think --” His mouth twisted in a grin. “You think I feel unsafe? Because of her?” He advanced on Will, eyes wide but still

distant, like there was a film separating them.

Will put up his hands. “She hurt you. I’m just concerned.”

“You think I’m some helpless little boy.”

“I don’t think you’re helpless.” Will took a step back.

“I’m not. The only reason she was able to take me down was because I made a stupid mistake.” He stepped up to will, a puzzled look on his face. “Why are you backing away, huh? Do you feel unsafe?”

Will planted his feet in the ground. Matthew stepped right up to him, leering, the cigarette clenched between his fingers. “Matthew --”

“Maybe you should be afraid of me,” Matthew said. “It was so easy to kill the bailiff and Richie. Really, it’s kind of amazing how easy it is to kill someone.” With his free hand he made the shape of the gun, pointing it at Will’s stomach. “Bang, one in the guts.” He took another step forward. “And another, in the head, to finish him off. It was nothing. Can you believe it? One moment, they’re there, and the next --” He put his index finger under Will’s chin, miming the shooting of a gun. “Pop. They’re gone.”

Will held his chin steady, not allowing himself to look away even as Matthew crowded him. “Once you’ve overcome the psychological barriers, the actual act of killing is not so difficult.”

Matthew placed his hand on the back of Will’s neck. “I snapped Richie’s neck for you.” He pressed his thumb against Will’s jugular. “The sound was surprisingly loud.”

Will swallowed. “Did you kill Hannah?”

The hand tightened at the back of Will’s neck, catching a few of his curls, as a shadow passed over Matthew's face. He stared hard at nothing, breath coming in shallow through his nose, nails digging into the back of Will’s neck. “Don’t,” he snarled. “Don’t do that.”

Will stayed stock still.

Matthew brought the cigarette up to his lips, wide-eyed as he sucked in the smoke, hand remaining on Will’s neck. He stared at the burning ember, fixated, then looked at Will’s throat.

He held Will’s neck and brought the end of the cigarette to his skin.

Will shoved him back, falling backwards as he did because of the chain between his feet.

Matthew leaped on top of him, and shoved his head to the side into the grass, hand hard over the bruises and taking Will's vision away with the pain. Matthew’s other hand squeezed his neck, the cigarette dropped in the grass. “What do you think happened?” Matthew hissed. “You think something’s wrong with me, huh? Yeah, well, there’s something wrong with me all right.”

Will shoved at the arm choking him, then punched Matthew in the jaw -- he didn't have enough reach, and just clipped him. Matthew laughed, hysterically. He squeezed harder, and Will felt his whole face flush with blood, like he was going to burst. "You don't get to look at me like that," Matthew said. "Like… like I'm some kind of victim."

Will smelled the grass, the dirt, his own blood. "No," he tried to gasp out, as his vision faded into a swarm of golden spots. He couldn't breathe. He clawed upward, towards Matthew's eyes, nails scraping his cheeks, but he couldn't reach, and Matthew's grip on his neck was relentless.

He's going to kill me, Will though, furious.

But Matthew shoved off of him, crushing his trachea beneath his palm. Will curled up on himself, coughing and breathing ragged, cradling his throat. Matthew pushed to his feet with a wince, staggering above Will. He gave a frustrated whine.

Will pushed himself to hands and knees, one hand still around his sore neck. Each breath tore painfully in his throat, and he felt nauseous from the pain in his head. He couldn't stand on his own if he tried.

Matthew bent down and grabbed Will by the shirt, hauling him easily to his feet. He walked Will in front of him, practically shoving him back towards the shed, Will nearly tripping over the chain.

Matthew threw him into the shed, slamming and locking the door behind him.

Gasping, Will made his way over to the mattress. He flopped on his back, sucking in ragged breaths. Everything felt swollen. He curled up, folding one hand under the mattress to feel the place where he had hidden the blade.

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When the sun had begun to set, Matthew returned to the shed. The sound of the padlock unlocking rang ominously through Will's bones. He sat up and put his back to the wall.

Matthew came in with a plate of food in hand. He set it by the mattress. His shoulders were curled inward and his eyes kept low, like a dog with its tail between its legs.

Will watched him wearily.

Matthew crawled onto the mattress, and pressed his head against Will's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Graham," he said softly, sounding young and vulnerable. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

Will let the physical contact happen but didn't respond, jaw set. He remembered how Matthew sounded when he called out to him from Hannah's cell. He remembered the photograph of the body left on the court steps. The barriers between everything were perilously thin -- right and wrong, pain and pleasure, helplessness and power. He felt Matthew's need for reassurance and stability, to be sure in his own power after suddenly finding himself vulnerable. It was making Matthew unstable.

"It's alright," Will said, bringing a hand up to Matthew's shoulder. "I know you don't want to hurt me."

Matthew pressed his nose into Will's neck. "Not unless you want me to, huh?"

Will felt cold pulse through him. "I shouldn't have ever asked that of you, Matthew. I don't want that."

Matthew shook his head, nudging Will's shoulder. "I only ever wanted to help. I want to give you whatever you need."

"But not my freedom."

Matthew pulled back to look at Will, one hand on the wall, his face close and earnest. "I can't let you go," he said simply. "I need you."

Chains

Chapter Summary

> *Will had imagined a scenario just like this just a handful of months before, and in that fantasy, Hannibal would find him. He didn't have the strength to laugh at that now. It wasn't even a desire to be rescued. Will had always rebuffed the idea that someone could come and save him from his own mind. It was, rather, a desire to be seen.*
>
> Will makes a mistake.

Chapter Notes

> an extra long and violent chapter for you. cw's at the bottom. thanks for your patience! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In Will’s dreams, the wendigo was not in the forest with him. It was inside. He staggered between the charred trees naked, trying to escape Matthew -- but his limbs were leadened, veins pulsing dark and sluggish beneath his skin. He could feel the tar roil in his belly, a hot liquid that was cooling and hardening into sharp edges. Dirt and ash slipped under his feet and he fell to his knees. Again. Scrambling back to his feet. His shins and feet were blackened by the ashy ground, hands smeared with charcoal as well.

A song of carnage reverberated through the forest, fire licking black glass, blood and blades of light.

The poison inside twisted into tines, pushing up between his organs and to the underside of his muscles, out of the abdominal cavity. Convulsing, the barbed spines pushed up against his skin. Will clawed at his back, breathing in hard, short bursts as the antlers pierced from within.

They grew out of his skin, elongating and twisting into the rack of a stag. Blood oozed from around the roots and spilled in fine lines all over his back.

He was becoming something else.

Like so many of his nightmares since his institutionalization, Will woke in a cold sweat and half hard, a confused arousal from the crossed wires in his brain. It always faded -- he hadn't been able to sustain an erection and had no desire to, the trauma and injury to his leg and imprisonment having completely shriveled up his sex drive. Still, the reaction to his nightmares and the sexual component of those dreams disturbed him. He couldn't shake the paranoia that he had been trained to react this way.

He didn't fall back asleep.

His headache was not much better than it had been the first day, worsened by even the soft impact against the grass when he had fallen; but his leg hurt terribly as well. There was a fresh bruise growing over his left thigh, where Matthew had kneeled on top of him. The start of the scar could be seen where it disappeared under the hem of his boxers. He slipped the cotton up to trace the arc of thick scar tissue from where it started atop his thigh to the star-shaped end near his groin where he had yanked out the hunting knife, and the short, shallow mark below where he had made another attempt at his femoral artery before the blood loss made him drop the blade. The muscle beneath had not healed well, and he could feel it every time he moved the leg laterally, though he had less trouble bending at the knee.

Will remembered how Hannibal had really started to struggle against his restraints when he started bleeding out.

“I didn't want you to die.”

You either underestimated my self-loathing, or overestimated my sense of self-preservation.

“You have tremendous instincts for survival. But you were ill.”

You made a mistake.

“You didn't die.”

Will made a frustrated noise, high in his throat. Then, coming to an idea, he began to wail as if he were still having a night terror.

Will made enough noise to draw Matthew from the house, confirming his suspicion that there was a mic in the shed, if not a camera.

Will played off like he’d had a nightmare, and Matthew was overly concerned and apologetic. He brought Will into the house to use the bathroom, a hand lingering on his shoulder as a way to apologize for his earlier outburst. There wasn't much to observe from the main house that was useful -- whoever had previously occupied the house before Matthew had left plenty of junk behind, and there had been at least one elderly person living here. Nothing between the kitchen and the bathroom told him anything about Matthew.

Matthew let Will into the bathroom and waited outside. There wasn't a lock on the door.

After relieving himself Will turned on the sink and splashed water on his face. The swelling had gone down most of the way, but the right side of his face was still darkly bruised and yellowing at the edges. Matthew had left bruises on his neck.

Indecision will kill you.

“You can take a shower, you know,” Matthew said from outside.

Will leaned on the sink, water running down his face. What was supposedly a simple offer was anything but. He shouldn't encourage any kind of intimacy with Matthew, and all of this started with a cold shower. The situation was unbalanced -- Matthew said he wanted Will to be a partner, but what he really wanted was to own him.

Will took a deep breath.

Underneath his skin, he felt the hum of violence like the charged sky before a storm.

What if he could be free?

“I’ll do that,” Will called to Matthew outside. “Thanks. Could I also get some clean clothes. Please?”

A beat. Then, “Oh, sure.”

Will waited until he heard Matthew walk down the hall, then pulled his shirt off over his head. His boxers followed. There was a path of bruises from his ribs to naval along the left side. Will peeled off the bandages from his back, the wounds beneath pink and dotted with darker, harder scabs from where the teeth of the key had torn deeper.

He turned on the water.

The sound prevented him from hearing anything outside of the bathroom. He searched through the cabinet under the sink and the rest of the room. There weren't any shaving razors or scissors, but he did find a jug of bleach. Will emptied one of the shampoo bottles and filled it with bleach, twisting on the battery cap. By the time he was done and finally stepped under the spray, he heard Matthew knock on the door. “I'm just going to set your clothes inside, alright Mr. Graham?”

Will stared at the dirty water swirling towards the drain over the chain linking his ankles together. The noise in his mind was falling away, false skin crumbling under the hot water and revealing smooth focus beneath. He was weak and bound. He could wait for a better opportunity.

“Mr. Graham?” Matthew knocked again, and he heard the door creak open.

Will scrubbed his hair under the water with one hand, the other holding the bottle of bleach. “Matthew?”

“Yeah?”

“How do you think of me?”

The water was finally starting to run clear between his feet.

“What do you mean?” Matthew was nervous. Excited.

The spray of water sang in his ears. Will ran a hand over his face, clearing the water from his brow and eyelids, and stretching his neck long. “What do you want of me?” he asked, gentle and longing. “What do you want us to be? Are you just helping me… get what I need… out of generosity?”

He was extending his lures out in the space between them. Steam billowed up from the spray.

“I want to kill with you,” Matthew said in a hushed voice. “I want to see you kill. I want…”

Will flipped the nozzle upright and squeezed out some of the bleach, testing.

“I want to see everything,” Matthew continued, breathless and earnest, following the bright temptation of intimacy. “Sometimes I feel like I know exactly what you're thinking, like our thoughts are the same. I just knew you were having a nightmare. I could feel it. Do you understand?”

He had stepped closer to the shower. Will parted the curtain halfway and stepped out, chain jangling, naked and dripping wet, and with his right hand and the bottle concealed from where he held the curtain. Matthew looked lost and lonely and utterly smitten, large eyes needy and staring as Will emerged.

A tug on his line.

“Do you feel it too?” Matthew asked.

Will thought of the precise grace of a knife at the cutting board. “Yes,” he answered, and squirted bleach in Matthew’s face.

Matthew yowled and pressed both hands to his eyes. Will grabbed him by the hair and smashed his face against the mirror, glass shattering in a spiderweb fracture.

Will planted both feet on the tile, and crushed his head against the mirror again with all of his strength. Matthew reached wildly back with a hand as he slumped against the sink, and Will slipped to the side, shuffling as fast as he could out of the bathroom and down the hall.

He stepped as quickly as he could to the central room of the first floor, rapidly taking inventory of his surroundings. He grabbed a blanket off the couch and the poker from the fireplace, then headed to the front door, no time to find shoes or a better weapon.

He burst from the front door, walking as briskly as he could without overextending his legs and tripping on the chain. He headed straight for the woods. Make it to the trees. Lose Matthew, or find a place to ambush him.

You should have killed him, came a voice in his head, sounding like Abigail.

He knew, like a weight dropping through water, that he had made a mistake.

Will made it to the first row of trees when the lights in the house went out behind him.

He put his back against a tree and breathed deeply, listening for the sounds of a door opening.

He couldn't outrun Matthew, but in the dark he might be able to lose him. Behind him, the house was utterly silent.

Will closed his eyes, and the metronome swung.

Outcomes played before his eyes, lightning fast. The woods were loud with insects, but not enough to cover the sound of his chain dragging through the dirt and undergrowth. If he tried to flee, Matthew would hear him and run him down. He had time to grab his weapon of choice -- not a gun, not for this, with the possibility of grievously injuring Will. Matthew wanted him alive. Something else, then. A crossbow bolt, thunk, sinking into the trunk of a tree. A taser, electricity crackling through his body. If Will stayed where he was, he could get the jump on Matthew, but only if he passed close enough. Matthew's eyes were injured by bleach. He would wait to hear the rattle of Will's chains before coming after him.

Will opened his eyes. The light from the shed was still on, faintly illuminating the yard and nearby trees, but where he was the dark was thick. Will used the poker to lift up the chain by catching a link on the hooked end. He took a short step forward, keeping the chain from dragging, and then another. It was awkward and even slower than he was able to move before, but it was silent. He had to maintain tension on the chain while stepping to prevent metal from clacking together, but if he overreached or pulled the poker up too high, he would trip over himself. With bare feet he felt the ground for dry twigs or leaves, stepping as soft as he could.

He made it about twenty paces before pausing behind the trunk of a thick tree and looking back towards the house. There was no one in sight, but he knew that Matthew was somewhere in the shadows, waiting.

Lure him to you, Abigail said.

Will continued his slow walk until he was in an area with dense trees, his legs shaking from the exertion and adrenaline. He crouched between the roots of a tree and unhooked the poker from the chain. By this time his eyes had adjusted fully to the dark and his ears were honed to pick up on stray sounds. On hands and knees he searched around the base of the tree, dirt clinging to his still-wet skin, until he found a rock about the size of his fist.

There were no audible footsteps in the woods, nothing beyond the soft rustlings of the underbrush from nocturnal critters or insects or the shifting of wind and gravity. Nothing identifiable as the approaching predator.

When Will shook the chain between his legs the sound struck cold in his bones. He waited a few seconds, and then lobbed the rock to the left, where it crashed some fifteen feet away.

His heart began to pound in his ears. He squatted between the roots of the tree and placed the folded blanket behind him.

It might have only been a minute before he heard Matthew approach on soft footsteps, but it felt like an hour.

Will closed his eyes.

The dark wrapped around him, smothering every distraction. His hands gripped firmly on the metal poker, held close to his body. He heard the buzz of crickets, wind shifting leaves all around him, and further away the airy hymn of high winds and distant cars on the highway. Insects turning softly through dirt, a distant owl, the crack of twigs underfoot. One step. Then another. Behind and to his left he felt Matthew stalk carefully forward. Close. Closer. Will made his breathing slow and quiet.

Matthew was parallel to him, some six feet to the left. Still, Will waited, eyes opening and sliding to the side to see the figure amongst the shadows, gun held one-handed by his chest. He hadn't seen Will yet.

One more step. Just take *one more step.*

Will was calm. His heart beat steadily, the mucky tar inside hardened into smooth glass. Matthew might be a killer, but so was he -- filled with muscle memories that weren't his own, no ghosts rattling in the cages of his mind but instead boiled down to hard, slick precision.

Matthew took another step, his back to Will.

Will leaped to his feet and swung the poker at his head.

Matthew spun.

The iron poker caught him in the collar.

Leaves and earth sliding under their feet.

Matthew fired the gun, which sounded softer than any silencer Will had heard before.

He felt a punch to his chest.

Will dragged Matthew to the ground with him by the poker embedded in his flesh. They crashed in the leaves, and Will yanked the poker out and up for another blow.

It fell out of his hand.

He felt heavy all over, hand weakly falling to the ground. Will looked down and saw a dart sticking out of his sternum.

Matthew's teeth glimmered in the dark, and then Will was sinking.

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In the murky dark of consciousness, reality came back in gasps and snatches. Slurring, dim moments: a body breathing close to his, the running of water, warmth biting through the cold, words echoing painfully in his raw skull. Will felt like he was sinking and floating in turn, vaguely aware of hands roaming over him and shifting shapes of light.

His body felt like lead, weighing down his skin. He couldn't move, but he felt warm and cocooned. He blinked and the world swam around him -- a bright, enclosed space, someone close, an arm under his shoulder.

"It's alright," the echoing voice came. There was a figure beside him, nearly wrapped around him. "You'll come back to consciousness before you can really move," it said, and then there was darkness and pressure -- a hand over his eyes. Water was poured over his head, soaking his hair and down his neck.

The hand was removed, and Will refocused his eyes. It was Matthew and -- Will was in a bath, naked and immobile. The water was dark and full of grey suds, his skin slick with soap and numb. He couldn't feel his fingers, let alone move them where his hand flopped against a leg, weak and useless.

Matthew leaned Will forward and kept him propped up with an arm, the other hand bringing a cup up to pour water over his back and wash away the remaining dirt. He smoothed a hand gently down his spine, over the scabs from the key and a large bruise on his shoulder, cleaning the pliant man. The water was getting dark with dirt.

Don't touch me, Will wanted to say. The hands scrubbing him clean seemed to draw lines of venom on the underside of his skin.

Matthew leaned Will back against the head of the tub, adjusting him so that he wouldn't slip under. He ran a hand through his dark curls, pushing them back out of his face, but Will was half unseeing, lips parting as if searching for words.

The water darkened. Blackened. Until it was thick and dense as ink, sloshing between Will's legs and rising up over his naval, ribs, knees; coming up over his chest, to his neck, dark and without reflection; and he was sinking, the black surging over his mouth and up his nose, into his ears; until he was swallowed up completely, floating down into the depths.

Pressure built as he sunk.

Squeezing all around him.

Silence mistaken for the roar of screams.

He was being carried, the motion jolting him out of the black ocean and into the peeling fragment of reality: the lights of the shed swaying and growing larger.

The sound of a metal chain being dragged on concrete.

A shadow looming over him, shifting the pieces of his body around.

The sliver of the concrete floor and the drain and the handle-like bar, only now with a chain locked around it.

Then Matthew was back, filling his entire vision. He loomed over Will with both hands resting on either side of his head, dark against the light from above, his eyes swollen and bloodshot and a deep crease in his brow. Blood and dirt on his shirt. “You lied to me,” he said, words heavy even as his mouth twisted into a smile. “I wanted to trust you. I knew I shouldn’t, but I wanted to.”

“Mmmm.” Will tried to speak, but his voice was weak.

Matthew moved closer, resting his forehead on Will’s. “Liar, liar,” he whispered. “Why did you even save me, if you think so little of me?”

He lowered himself to Will’s side, one arm wrapped around him, and held him close.

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In the early morning, Hannibal arrived at the Bureau Headquarters. As he stepped out of his car he noticed Beverly Katz across the parking lot, caught in a compromised position: in stepping out of her SUV she spilled coffee down one pant leg and released a long stream of curses. That venting of frustration apparently being insufficient, she threw the cup of coffee as far as she could, dark coffee arching spectacularly through the air.

It was a delightful show of discomposure, all the more so when Ms. Katz noticed Hannibal watching her and her frustration seemed to compound. He waved and approached her as she swatted at the wet stain on her jeans.

“A fitting punishment for the crime,” Hannibal said, glancing at the empty paper cup that was completing its trajectory rolling along the concrete.

“Except now I don't have coffee,” Ms. Katz muttered. Hannibal offered her a handkerchief and she took it, glancing at the material a moment before saying *thanks* and patting her leg. Up close, Hannibal could see that there were bags under her eyes from lack of sleep.

“I'm sure that can be remedied,” Hannibal replied.

“What are you doing here so early?” she asked.

Hannibal glanced into her car and saw a copy of the child abduction case on the passenger seat. “I often wake early, and found that Jack had left me a message asking me to come in today. Since I have the day free, here I am.”

Beverly finished drying her pants and handed Hannibal the handkerchief. “We were at a scene,” she explained.

Hannibal folded the handkerchief and slipped it into his pocket, while Beverly retrieved the folder. “Mind giving me a hand with the evidence?” she asked.

“Of course.”

They loaded up on boxes and headed towards the lab. “Crawford probably called you in because we’re understaffed,” Beverly said. “The scene isn't related to Will. Sorry, I probably should have said that first. But the scene did have a lot of brown hair and kids clothes.”

“Our mutilator.”

“Could be. There were no *human* bodies.”

Hannibal arched his brow.

“How much do you know about taxidermy?” she asked.

Fascinating. “I have a passing familiarity.”

They arrived at the lab, and Hannibal let Beverly sort through the evidence. He wandered over to one of the work tables, where there was the fiber evidence from the BSHCI. There were not only the bloody shreds of uniform but a few unmarried uniforms and men's casual clothes. “I had hoped there was some development in Will’s case,” he admitted, picking up the thread from earlier in the conversation. He could sense Ms. Katz watching him, but he just bent to peer more closely at the evidence, hands folded behind his back.

Hannibal closed his eyes, and breathed in deeply. Scents from Matthew’s clothing drifted up and into the sounding bowl of his mind, floating and shaping until they were identifiable: cold stone, bleach, and latex from the hospital; a spiced deodorant and the natural musk beneath; diesel and cigarette smoke; chopped wood and sawdust and sap.

“We’re not going to stop looking for Will.” Beverly sighed heavily behind him. “I hate it when this happens -- why can’t killers wait politely for us to wrap the last case before dropping creepy murder cabins on us?”

Hannibal opened his eyes and straightened with a deep breath, settling the palette of scents in his mind. “I take it the scene was found by local police?” he inquired.

“They didn’t know exactly what they had found, but they knew it was something bad. It might be the Mutilator’s work space. Maybe he had to move from there suddenly, and that’s why we found Eloise McGuire. Sloppy disposal because he was on the move.”

Hannibal turned back to her curiously. “You don’t think Eloise was his first victim?”

Beverly rubbed her eyes. “Honestly, it was Will that said he’s killed before.” She winced, looking down at the bags of evidence. “I visited him hoping to get some insight. He said the mutilations were not experimental -- that he knew exactly what pieces he wanted.”

Hannibal glanced over the evidence she was laying out -- Hair, clothes, treated hides, charred bones, and what looked to be a whole shaved cat embalmed in some sort of resin. Having found the source of her frustration, he couldn't help but press it. "You think that if Will were here, you would be able to catch this killer."

Beverly emptied the last of the evidence out, lips pressed into a thin line and glowering down at the table. She rested her hands on the edge for a moment, then her eyes softened and she looked up at Hannibal. Evaluating. "Two birds, one stone," she said, jaw tense. "One stone's not enough for either."

Hannibal dropped his gaze with a brief, soft smile. "I'm more worried for Will than for myself," he confessed. "A part of me hopes that he will come to me for whatever retribution he imagines I deserve, so that I know he is alive and well." He looked up to see Beverly frowning slightly.

"The idea of Will escaping with Matthew really pisses me off," she said.

"And if he didn't?"

"Then I'm worried. The trail is cold. I couldn't find anything in Matthew's possessions. Apartment's clean. No other properties or vehicles, no living relatives." She gestured out over the table. "With both cases we're sitting on a mountain of evidence and none of it points the way."

"It's difficult to see the forest for the trees."

Her lips pulled into a smirk. "Yeah. We could really use a profiler right now."

"Will has a unique insight," Hannibal replied. "I suppose you'll have to make do with me."

Beverly searched his eyes for a moment, and for a moment Hannibal thought she would say something. Her suspicion surfaced and ebbed, and Hannibal would need to tread carefully to gain her trust and blind her if he was to remain cosy with the BAU. Catching the Mutilator would go a long way towards that cause -- perhaps he could be served up in pieces, skinned and disarticulated. "Well," Hannibal offered. "Let's get to work."

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Eventually, the chemical restraint wore off.

Daylight streamed through the windows and onto the concrete floor of the shed, swimming with floating particles of dust. Will rolled his head to either side, eyes sweeping around the room and confirming that he was alone. Sitting up on the bare mattress, he still felt heavy and sluggish, and his head throbbed painfully. With the momentary reprieve granted by his solitude, he evaluated himself -- Matthew had bathed him and dressed him in a clean pair of boxers but nothing else. His wrists were bound before him in a matching set of metal cuffs,

and the cuffs around his ankles were now attached by a heavy chain to the bar installed in the floor around the drain. There was enough length on the chain to get to the mattress, but not much further; Will was sure he couldn't reach any of the tools on the left side of the room to get himself free. There was a sandwich on a plate next to the mattress, as well as a jug of water.

Will felt pressure build behind his eyes and around his throat, hot and panicky. He had tried to escape, and now he was even worse off than he was before.

The exhaustion and stress from the past days -- he didn't even know how many days -- hit him like getting dragged under a wave over and over. His skin felt too tight, his insides churning and lighting up with static. He couldn't even hold his arms around himself with his wrists bound as they were, so he pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes and rocked gently back and forth.

It wasn't just this dangerous imprisonment. He was exhausted -- from the months of hospitalization and surveillance; from battling with his own mind, avoiding what he didn't want to know and then peeling back the lids of his eyes to see. And even before that: his illness, the fire in his brain, the helpless train wreck of his mind and life spiraling continuously behind his eyes, over and over again to the antler room where Abigail died and everything broke; how long he had tried to hold the pieces together only to have the very foundation of his salvaging ripped away; Hannibal, fucking Hannibal Lecter, serial killer, cannibal, haunting nightmare of his subconscious. It was too much. It had been too much for too long, and he couldn't give up. Even now, he couldn't cry, he couldn't scream -- because if he did, he might never return, and he needed to remain functional. He needed to survive.

But Will was tired. He didn't want to survive. He wanted to curl up and wade into the quiet of the river and never return.

"You can kill him." Abigail said, sitting beside him on the mattress. He could feel her weight there, almost real. *"You nearly did. Don't give up now."*

Will rubbed his eyes and turned to look at her. She gave him an awkward smile. Her long brown hair fell over her shoulders but she wore no scarf, and Will could see the pink scar around her neck.

I think I just ruined my chance at escape, Will thought in reply. He could have beat Matthew down in the bathroom, couldn't he? He had caught him by surprise, and then --

"You didn't want to kill him," she said.

No, Will admitted. *But I should have.*

"He's not going to kill you, you know." Abigail bent her knees and wrapped her arms around them, resting her chin to look towards him, briefly glancing at his restraints. *"He wants to keep you. Like a pet. You're the object of his obsession."*

I suppose you'd know about that.

Abigail sighed. *"I never tried to escape my father. Not really. I thought I could go to college and then… things would be better."* She smiled sadly. *"Something's wrong with me. If I were a good person, I would have done something differently."*

You were just a child, Abigail. You did what you had to do to survive.

"And beyond that?" Abigail asked. *"Is that why you didn't kill Matthew? Because there is a certain point beyond survival where we become monsters."*

Will stared at the chain. *I've tried my whole life to tell myself that I'm not a monster.*

"But you are a survivor," Abigail said earnestly. *"Don't give up. Please. If you give up, I'll kill you."*

Will smiled, despite himself.

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Will ate. He drank the water provide him. He tested the range of his chain and spent futile minutes messing with the locks on the chain. He pissed in the drain and tried not to think about asking Matthew to escort him back to the house or to the woods to shit. He wrapped a blanket around himself to keep warm. The break-away blade was still hidden in the mattress.

When Matthew came back, he was drunk. He leered at Will, head cocked far to the side, and fingers tapping obsessively on his thigh. "We both look like we've seen better days," he said through a grin, and it was true -- they were each covered in bruises, and the skin around Matthew's eyes was still puffy and red from the bleach. "It's been one hell of a week, huh?"

Will didn't say anything, staring up from where he was seated on the mattress.

"Tsk, tsk." Matthew sucked on his teeth, shaking his head back and forth. He spun on his foot and started wandering around the shed. "What am I going to do with you, Mr. Graham?"

Will sighed out some of the tension in his shoulders. "What do you want to do with me?" he asked.

"Hmmm." Matthew ran his hands over the chains and rope on the opposite wall. "That is the question, huh? What I want." He glanced over his shoulder, voice oily with mockery. "You're at my mercy."

"Do you want to kill me?" Will asked.

Matthew sighed, and turned back to him, eyes raking over him. "I never wanted to kill you," he said with a frown. "But you don't want to be my friend." He bit his lip, making the little sucking noise again. "Which puts us in this odd situation. Maybe I can convince you that you want to be my friend."

He drifted over to the side of the shed with the tools. “We’re both hawks, Mr. Graham. They're solo hunters, but the little birds can gang up to take them down. You ever see it before? A hawk swarmed in the sky, until it drops.” Despite his own injuries he walked easily, nearly swaying as he perished the shed’s contents, no longer limping. “If us hawks worked together though, we could be unstoppable. No more cages. Excluding this temporary arrangement, of course.”

He leaned forward to examine the pegboard of tools, then quickly dismissed it to poke through some boxes. “Pain’s a pretty good motivator, wouldn’t you say?”

Will took a slow breath, his eyes never leaving Matthew. “Have you ever trained dogs before?” Will asked.

“No, can’t say that I have.”

“You train a loyal companion through positive reinforcement, not punishment,” he explained. “If you want me to be your friend, pain isn’t going to accomplish that.” He said it flatly.

Matthew made a high sound of pleasure, picking something out of a box. He turned the radio antenna over in his hands, delighted. “But you’re not a dog, Mr. Graham.” Matthew strolled back over to him, striking his palm lightly with the thin end of the antenna. “A dog doesn’t really understand why he’s being punished, does he? You, on the other hand, you know why you’re being punished.”

Will wrapped the blanket tighter around him, staring at the extended metal rod. He felt cold inside, retreating behind his remaining defenses in preparation for the pain. “This isn’t about motivation. You just want to hurt me.” He made himself look at Matthew. His eyes were wide and bright, edged with cruel intention.

Matthew waved the antenna at Will. “I’ll give you a chance to behave. Remove the blanket and lie on your stomach.”

Will tensed all over.

He didn’t move.

The muscles in Matthew’s arm flexed, and the next thing Will knew there was a bright pain across his arm, the blanket only doing so much to dull the sting. He gasped in shock and held himself still, unwilling to give Matthew the satisfaction of crying out in pain, hands holding the blanket tight to his chest and shoulders drawn up to his ears. Matthew squared his feet and tipped the point of the antenna under Will’s chin. “That was your chance, by the way,” he said.

Will snatched at the antenna, but Matthew drew it quickly back and down on him again. The sound of metal whizzing through the air seemed to happen at the same time as a stripe of pain licked across his shoulder. Another strike caught him on the other side, hard enough to daze him; then Matthew whipped the antenna across his face. That blow was lighter than the others but cut through skin, shockingly painful, and Will raised his hands to protect his face.

Matthew yanked the blanket away and continued laying stripes into Will, hard and relentless for his disobedience. Will tried to throw himself at Matthew and fight back, but Matthew shoved him back on the mattress and beat him with his full strength. Stunned, Will curled up on himself, pressing his face into the mattress and covering his head to protect himself, gasping in shock and gritting his teeth in turn to try to keep from making any noise. His skin was on fire, the antenna cutting bloody stripes on his skin wherever it landed. Instinctively, Will brought up his legs to shield his belly. Lights danced behind his closed eyes.

Matthew stopped, panting. “See, that was stupid. This is exactly where I wanted you to be, that was just -- so unnecessary, wasn’t it?”

Will shuddered all over, the pain taking his breath away. Matthew nudged his legs with a foot, and, when Will refused to move, he struck him across the back as hard as he could, across a fresh cut.

Will yelled at that -- a sharp noise that dissolved into a pitiful moan. Matthew pulled his legs out so he was on his stomach on the mattress, then stood over him, boot pressing into the back of one thigh.

“You’re prideful, aren’t you?” Matthew asked. He trailed the tip of the antenna down over Will’s back, make him shake and tense every time it went over raw, open skin. “Stay still, and I’ll go easy on you.”

“Fuck you,” Will snarled.

Matthew laughed, and struck him high by his neck. For a moment Will’s vision went white. Matthew tapped the antenna on either side of Will’s neck, grinding his boot down on Will’s leg -- just his luck that it was the left leg, the pressure on his scar tissue, even indirect, digging deep with pain.

“You like this kind of thing, though, don't you?” Matthew asked curiously, striking Will softer across his lower back. He lowered himself to one knee and held the round tip of the antenna with one hand, bending it backwards and aimed at Will. He let go of the end and the tension snapped the rod down, making Will jerk. Matthew watched the spasm of his back and hips and the vertical stripe glow red and raw on his skin.

Will sucked in a breath through his mouth, attempting to regulate his breathing before the pain made him hyperventilate. Matthew flicked the rod against him again, and even though it hurt less, the building sensation coiled inside and made him nauseous. The pain was sharp and throbbing over his back, arms, and face, adrenaline pumping through his veins and skin slick with sweat and blood. He felt thrown out of himself, scrambling back for purchase before panic came. “You think,” he gasped, spittle on his chin, “I like this?”

“You're a masochist,” Matthew said. He pulled the antenna into a tight arch, and let it fly.

Will ground his teeth against the scream fighting for release, eyes swimming with unshed tears. “You're wrong,” he hissed.

Matthew straightened up with one last bent strike up Will’s spine. “Then why did you ask me to do it before, hmm?” He swatted a rhythm of blows across one side and then another, but didn't break skin. Will ground his teeth down, his hands curled in tight fists where they were pressed above his head. “I think you need this. Just give me time to figure out how to push your buttons.”

A hard strike caught him off guard and forced out a harsh grunt of pain. Will’s back curled. Matthew saw the opportunity and lifted the rod high over his head.

Crack!

Will howled.

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He had asked for it, hadn't he?

Will had imagined scenarios like this constantly: being taken and beaten and used and left for dead, helpless and broken. Even when he was younger he had thought about being beaten by other kids, badly enough that when his father found him he would wrap him up in his arms and take care of him in the most fundamental way. It wasn't just fantasizing about the awful devastation of his body -- it was being seen: hurt and broken and openly needing, no longer able to hide.

Will had imagined a scenario just like this just a handful of months before, and in that fantasy, Hannibal would find him. He didn't have the strength to laugh at that now. It wasn't even a desire to be rescued. Will had always rebuffed the idea that someone could come and save him from his own mind. It was, rather, a desire to be seen.

Look: here is the darkness waiting in my mind.

See: how I war with it.

Will’s back was so raw and sore that he couldn't move from his prone position on his stomach. He didn't have the strength to protest when Matthew cleaned his back with a wet cloth and alcohol swabs, though the sting nearly made him faint.

Will vomited twice. Matthew brought in the hose to wash the chunks of sandwich down the drain.

“That was too much, wasn't it,” Matthew said after he had washed down the concrete.

Will wiped the bile from his mouth. “Was what Hannah did too much?”

Matthew stiffened, his lopsided grin sliding into a tight line. “She’s got nothing to do with us.”

Will rested his head back on his arm, eyes nearly closed from exhaustion. “You're experimenting with cruelty and control,” he said in a low voice. “Reclaiming your power.” He paused, waiting for Matthew to look back at him, round eyes sliding skeptical towards him. “You should kill again. Beating me is only going to confuse you.”

“I'm not confused,” Matthew retorted. “I know what I want.”

“You want to hurt me.” Will licked his lips, attempting to focus through the waves of pain. “Well, you've accomplished that. How did it feel to beat me?”

“It felt good,” Matthew said, though there was something sour in his voice.

“And now?”

Matthew looked away. He coiled the hose up and dropped it outside the shed. Will heard him light up a cigarette and felt his eyes heavy on the wounds on his back. “It feels good to take care of you too.”

Chapter End Notes

cw: physical abuse, show typical violence, invasive touch (non-sexual)

Like All Caged Animals

Chapter Summary

For a moment, Will couldn't see anything else. Matthew and the shed disappeared into a tunnel of darkness and all that was left was Hannibal seeing him, and him seeing Hannibal. His amber eyes grew dark as blood, leaving Will's face only for a moment to glance over his body to evaluate further injuries, noting the cuffs in his ankles and wrists and his undressed state. When they locked eyes again Will felt Hannibal's fury like lava sliding inexorably over his skin, paving new landscapes and hissing into the cold sea. Hannibal's lips parted and then pursed, bending around the soft shape of his name. "Will."

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Will is free.

Chapter Notes

welcome (back) to hell. we're about to have some fun

I just wanted to thank everyone for sticking with this fic. your readership and comments mean the world to me <3 come say hi on tumblr! cw's at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time evening settled dim and foreboding around the shed, the cuts from the radio antenna had hardened with the first layer of healing skin, and so too did Will's mind stiffen with callous defenses, crude and inflexible. For Matthew Will felt nothing, not even anger; for himself, barely more. The scope of his imagination narrowed to a dark tunnel and he was aware of no thought, moving instinctively to lick his wounds. He watched himself as if he were puppeting his own actions: he took the break away blade out from under the mattress and snapped two segments off against the concrete floor. He hid that small blade on top of his wrist under the handcuff.

For a moment he saw Matthew laying next to him on the mattress, eyes closed with the rhythm of sleep, calm and content like a boy lying with his pup; and Will took the small blade and cut once, deeply, across his jugular. How the mattress would soak with blood as Will wrestled him down, holding him close so that he couldn't stop the bleeding, the both of them rocking and shuddering in a deadly embrace.

Matthew brought Will a microwaved burrito for dinner and flicked on the lights in the shed. He also set a bucket down near the mattress, and Will glared at it for a moment.

“I'm going away for a few hours,” Matthew said softly. “I'll be back in the morning. Will you need anything else, Mr. Graham?”

Words were difficult, unsticking from the back of his throat. “Now that I have a bucket to shit in, what else could I desire?”

Matthew ignored that with a frown, going to the far end of the shed to bring Will another jug of water. “I'll bring you back something nice, for good behavior.”

Then he left Will, bolting the shed door shut behind him.

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By the time Hannibal and Beverly had finished dissecting the taxidermy cat, squirrels, and raccoon, the remainder of the Behavioral Analysis Unit had returned from processing the cabin. They all gathered around the metal bed in the morgue where the animals were arranged.

“He scooped out their insides and filled them with sawdust,” Beverly explained. “Shaved them and sealed their skin in a homemade mix of plastic and coniferous resin and shellac. On this one --” She pointed to the raccoon. “-- He grafted two square inches of human scalp onto the back. The scalp had been tanned and dried.”

Zeller gawked at the raccoon, almost swaying on his feet and eyes puffy from lack of sleep. Jack looked grim. “I know a bird taxidermist out of Pennsylvania,” Price said, sounding more awake than the others. “It's a real art form. This, on the other hand…”

“Our mutilator is experimenting,” Hannibal explained. “He ran into some trouble with this squirrel. He cast it in the resin before properly drying the interior, which lead to decay and excess cracking of the skin.” He depressed the chest cavity of the squirrel with two gloved fingers to demonstrate. “His methods are creative but uneducated, and his handling of the materials is clumsy.”

“So what are we looking at?” Jack asked. “He experimented preserving animals and then moved on to children?”

“Some of the animals were fresh,” Price countered.

“I believe the opposite has occurred,” Hannibal said. “He began by kidnapping children, perhaps just one, and is now teaching himself how to preserve a corpse.”

They were all silent for a moment. Hannibal watched them each put together what he had already figured out.

“He didn't keep Eloise for more than a day,” Zeller said, “But we found signs of cohabitation with a child. Kiddie microwave dinners.”

“Those gummy vitamins,” Zeller said as he snapped awake. “Wouldn't get those for someone he was planning on getting rid of.”

“The kids he's taking now,” Beverly added grimly. “They're replacement parts.”

“The cabin is located in an area of Virginia occupied by a community of off-the-grid anarchist types,” Jack explained. “Very hesitant to talk to police. Agents Hoyt and Burke are still there trying to appeal to their sympathies.”

“I'm unsure if such people would respond well to being accused of harboring a child killer,” Hannibal said.

“It's our best shot at a lead if we don't get a hit on fingerprints. Alright,” Jack barked and pointed at Katz and Zeller. “You two: get a few hours of sleep. I expect you bright eyed and bushy tailed for the 4PM brief. Doctor -- a word?”

Jack brought Hannibal to his office. “These are the kinds of leaps of logic I would expect from Will.”

Hannibal watched as Jack ran his hand over the heavy round paperweight on his desk, currently holding down an untamed stack of paperwork. A glance at his desk told Hannibal exactly how thin Jack was spread. “And if this theory came from Will, you wouldn't hesitate to follow the lead.”

“Right now, I have to be very tactical with my resources,” Jack said. “One body does not a pattern make. Any missing child case that fits our supposed type could be derailed if we take over the investigation.”

“If I may, Jack,” Hannibal said. “Within the day you will have DNA that either confirms or denies the human remains belong to Eloise McGuire, and whether there are other victims. There will soon be clarity on the profile.”

“Doesn't feel like I have time to twiddle my thumbs.”

“You are nervous about detracting man-power from the search for Will.”

Jack sighed deeply, his barrel chest expanding. “I don't like second guessing myself.”

It would of course be better if Hannibal found Will before the FBI. Right now it was unclear what path would lead to that outcome -- rerouting FBI resources to the Mutilator or waiting to pounce on a lead from the team. He would let this play out further, and focused on giving Jack the advice he needed. “What would you do if you had no personal connection to Will?” Hannibal asked.

“Losing track of one of our own is a factor,” Jack pointed out, them considered. “He’s a dangerous serial killer with a history of mental instability. He poses a verifiable risk to the public. Whereas the Mutilator is not confirmed to be a repeat offender.”

Hannibal nodded.

“Do you think that Will is dangerous?” Jack asked.

Hannibal opened his palms. “Will is delusional,” he said, suffering a twinge of ugliness at the lie. “But his violence was always contextual. If he is with a violent partner, Will’s latent violence may be amplified, regardless of whether they are cooperating or one has taken the other victim.”

“If Will is in danger, I’ll have abandoned him,” Jack said.

“Don't let guilt from your past cloud your judgment,” Hannibal advised kindly.

Finally Jack sat down in his chair, quite literally weighed down by his responsibilities. “I lost an agent before,” he explained in a low voice. “Miriam Lass. She was a trainee.”

Hannibal paused as if recalling information, while in reality he was thinking about Abigail and Miriam at the cliff house. “She was killed by the Chesapeake Ripper,” Hannibal said at last.

“I pulled her out of a classroom. Like I pulled Will out of a classroom.”

“Follow the trail when it's hot, Jack. If you like, I can have a look at Matthew Brown’s apartment. Fresh eyes.”

For a moment, Hannibal wondered if Jack would call him out on the morbid joke. After all, the Mutilator had taken the child’s eyes. But Hannibal hid his smile and Jack didn't comment on it. “You want to find him as badly as I do,” Jack observed.

“Does that surprise you?”

“No. I suppose not.”

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"Hello," Hannibal said politely, fingering the exact-o blade tucked in his sleeve. "Matthew Brown, I believe?"

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Morning. The woods were loud with the chorus of early summer and warmth was slow to fill the shed, sucked down into the cold concrete floor. Will shed the cracking shell of

nightmares, long curls in disarray over his purpled face as he slowly stretched his limbs and stood to piss and drink water. He was a cicada shivering out of its husk, leaving behind a version of himself, a delicate transparent mold. The swelling in his face had gone down completely by now but his features were hard like the basalt core of an eroding cliff.

Reality was stiff and unyielding. Time passed incurably slow, and Will just sat with the blanket wrapped around him, waiting. The only shifts in the shed were the light as clouds passed before the sun and the similarly tidal pain from his raw back.

Eventually: the sound of tires rolling up the gravel path. A car door slamming closed, then another. Slow steps and the squeaky turn of a rusted wheel. The bolt being unlocked on the shed door.

Will didn't move from where he was sitting and staring at the drain, even as the door open and Matthew gave a cheery, “Good morning, Mr. Graham.” Out of the corner of his eye he saw Matthew pushing a body in a hospital wheelchair to the center of the shed, but Will’s eyes were fixed in place.

Matthew squatted next to Will, peering into his catatonic face. “I brought you a gift,” he said with a grin.

Will didn't need Matthew to pull the cloth bag off the man’s head with a flourish to recognize who it was; he had known who it was the moment the door had opened, even before he glanced at familiar shoes and brown windowpane suit. Will had felt it.

Hannibal Lecter sat unconscious in the folding wheelchair, his suit and hair in a state of gentle disarray but without any obvious injuries. Matthew waited for Will’s reaction with a giddy, smug smile. For a long moment Will just stared, blue eyes pale and face set in stony resignation. A heavy rectangle of light lay between them from the window.

All of a sudden Will’s breath picked up between parted lips, and the blue in his eyes was reduced to a sliver around his pupils. “You brought me a gift,” Will repeated in a low, thick voice. Like unsticking from molasses his eyes snapped over to Matthew, and then his voice was tinged with mockery. “Does this mean I’ve been a good dog?”

Matthew chuckled. “Good dogs get treats,” he assured Will, and patted Hannibal on the shoulder.

Matthew got to work and Will returned his attention to Hannibal, watching his even and slow breathing. It was infuriating how unchanged Hannibal looked. After all that Will had been through, after all the changes, maybe Hannibal hadn't changed at all. Matthew brought a step stool over to the opposite wall and selected a heavy, white rope. He tied it securely around the barrel of the hand crank winch attached to the wall and wound the rope over itself several times. Stepping up to the ceiling Matthew fed the end of the rope through the first pulley, and then the one above the drain. Giving himself enough slack, Matthew clasped Hannibal’s hands together and wrapped the rope around his forearms, finishing it off with a secure knot near his hands. Matthew whistled while he worked.

Will saw Hannibal’s eyes twitch under their lids and his breathing pick up by a fraction.

Matthew grabbed the handles of the wheelchair and spilled Hannibal onto the floor with obvious relish. Hannibal's body collapsed heavy and gracelessly to the concrete and he groaned. Will watched his face for signs of consciousness, catching the tensing muscles around his eyes. Matthew pushed the chair away with another flourish, where it crashed against the tool table. Like a kid in a candy store. He returned to the wall and began to wind the winch, drawing Hannibal's arms up with the rhythmic *click-click-click* of the turning handle. Slowly, Hannibal was lifted upright until only the tips of his shoes touched the concrete floor.

"Look familiar?" Matthew asked Will with hushed reverence. There was a shine of sweat on his brow from the exertion.

Will looked at Matthew, then back at Hannibal, who was slowly coming awake. He wasn't sitting slumped against the wall of the antler room, but the image of him with his arms tied above his head echoed that fever memory. It was a familiar and compromising position. "You're granting me a second chance," Will said slowly.

Matthew walked over to him and cupped the side of his face. "We can finish it. Together." His thumb brushed Will's chapped lips. "You can repay him for his betrayal."

Matthew turned and swaggered back to Hannibal, unsheathing a hunting knife from his hip. Not just any hunting knife -- it was Will's. Matthew must have taken it from the bailiff he murdered. Will stared at it and for a moment felt like Matthew's hands were his own.

"Wake up," Matthew cooed, slapping Hannibal roughly on the cheek. Another groan rumbled deep in his chest, and slowly his eyes blinked open, glazed and unseeing. The hairs on the back of Will's neck stood on end and he drew the blanket tighter around himself.

Matthew peered closely into Hannibal's face, for a moment blocking Will's line of sight. "Morning sunshine," Matthew said with a grin, stepping back. "So glad you could join us."

Hannibal blinked, dazed. Then his eyes locked onto Will's.

For a moment, Will couldn't see anything else. Matthew and the shed disappeared into a tunnel of darkness and all that was left was Hannibal seeing him, and him seeing Hannibal. His amber eyes grew dark as blood, leaving Will's face only for a moment to glance over his body to evaluate further injuries, noting the cuffs in his ankles and wrists and his undressed state. When they locked eyes again Will felt Hannibal's fury like lava sliding inexorably over his skin, paving new landscapes and hissing into the cold sea. Hannibal's lips parted and then pursed, bending around the soft shape of his name. "Will."

Hannibal turned his attention to Matthew, and Will could see the whole scene again. "Are you Will's admirer?" Hannibal asked, sounding a bit breathless but still conversational.

"We have a mutual respect," Matthew replied, tapping the flat of the blade against Hannibal's thigh.

"Clearly," Hannibal said with a pointed glance at Will in his restraints. "You're a nurse at the hospital," Hannibal added, disdain hidden in a lightly mocking tone. "You're setting the

standard of care.”

“Care is relative, wouldn't you say, Doctor? Sometimes the treatment is painful.” Matthew turned the knife so the blade was pressing into Hannibal’s thigh.

“Matthew,” Will said in warning.

Matthew pulled the blade away, holding it by only his thumb and forefinger with the other fingers extended in a sign of appeasement to Will. He wasn't going to cut Hannibal without Will’s participation. “I'm going to ask you a few yes or no questions to satisfy my curiosity,” Matthew told Hannibal, peering closely into his face again. “Did you frame Will Graham?”

Will’s breath caught in his chest. Hannibal said nothing, staring down at Matthew.

“I can ask you yes-or-no questions and you don't have to say a word, and I'll know what the answer is,” Matthew explained. “The pupil dilates with specific mental efforts. You dilate, that's a ‘yes’. No dilation equals ‘no’.”

Hannibal stared back, unblinking, so Matthew could evaluate his pupils.

“Are you the Chesapeake Ripper?” Matthew asked.

Hannibal’s lips curled in a small smile.

“How many times have you seen someone cling to a life not really worth living?” Matthew asked. “Eking out a last few seconds. Wondering why they bother.”

“I know why,” Hannibal said. “Life is precious.”

Matthew stepped back with an incredulous look, and started to laugh. But Will heard the sincerity in Hannibal’s voice and it set every hair on his body on end. Slowly, he pushed himself to his feet.

Hearing the rattling chain, Matthew turned and stepped back to make room for Will in their little trio. Where his skin wasn't dark with bruising, Will was pale and haggard, hunched in on himself and weary, still wrapped up in the blanket. “Time to open up your gift,” Matthew said with a fond smile.

“Will isn't the killer you think he is,” Hannibal said to Matthew, though he didn't look away from Will.

Matthew laughed. “No,” he conceded. “Not yet. But he’s about to be.”

They were all poised. Matthew looked over Hannibal while adjusting the grip on his knife, deciding where to make the first cut. Will straightened his spine and let the blanket fall off his shoulders and pool around his feet. Hannibal watched Will curiously, glancing to take in the bruises on his neck and the few stripes on his arms and side where the antenna had curled around, but always back to his face.

Will had the feeling that if he tried to kill Hannibal now, Hannibal might let it happen just for the experience.

But it was wrong. It was all wrong.

Matthew stepped towards Hannibal with the knife. He grabbed the lapel of his suit and started cutting through the stitches at the shoulder seam. “Do you want to kill me?” Hannibal asked Will, ignoring Matthew for now.

For a moment, Will was frozen. The words were barely a whisper. “I do.”

Hannibal’s eyes went dark. It wasn't fear.

Matthew grabbed a pair of safety shears from the tool rack, leaving the two men to stare at each other into eternity. Matthew cut up Hannibal’s sleeve. It was what Will had done in the antler room: first, cut through the stitching in the arm hole, then along the sleeves, then through the breast of the suit jacket to tear the clothing away, like he was dismembering Hannibal’s shell. It was also painfully reminiscent of how Hannah had used Matthew’s uniform to bind him and gag him. Matthew tore the sleeve of the suit and shirt out of the arm seam and the sound of fabric tearing made both Will and Matthew flinch.

The sleeve dropped next to the drain. Will stared at it in horror.

“Is this your design, Will?” Hannibal asked. “A reprise of your first serenade? A harmony for two.”

Matthew raised the knife to Hannibal’s bare arm. He paused to give a glance over his shoulder at Will, but Will didn't stop him.

Will watched Matthew cut down his forearm from beneath the coil of rope to the inside of his elbow. Hannibal made no noise, only tensing with the pain, lips a pale thin line. Matthew turned to look at Will expectantly.

“His left leg,” Will said with a thick voice. “That's where the smoking mirror was placed.”

Matthew looked puzzled, but Hannibal's features softened from pain to delight. He understood. “You want to cut him where you cut yourself?” Matthew asked.

Will bent down and picked up the sleeve, feeling the fabric under his thumb. Hannibal hissed in pain then, and Will looked up for the source -- but Matthew hadn't hurt him again. Suddenly, Will understood: in bending down, he had shown Hannibal his wounded back.

Hannibal’s eyes blazed.

Will felt the weight of fantasies surge around them. He was tied to the table, abdominal cavity open and laced with fishing hooks; he was falling bloody at Hannibal’s feet in the snow; he was being raped in front of him; he was driving the hunting knife into his thigh while Hannibal pulled against the barbed wire restraining him.

Will stood up, leaving the sleeve on the ground. He could see blood pooling in Hannibal's armpit before disappearing beneath what remained of his clothes. “He’s my mirror,” Will explained. “He has to bleed as I bled.” Will dragged his eyes over to Matthew. “Matthew. Give me the knife.”

Matthew licked his lips, eyes dancing between Will’s. He wanted to believe Will, but still had his doubts. “After we finish with his clothes,” Matthew said, and Will nodded in agreement.

“You couldn’t resist making a mockery of my last line to safety,” Will said to Hannibal, as Matthew started taking off the other sleeves. “My surrogate was hung by his left foot. Tezcatlipoca was depicted with a mirror replacing his left foot.”

“Or a snake,” Hannibal said. “Or bone.”

“More subtle than leaving a broken black mirror.” Will’s blue eyes were icy, lips nearly drawn into a snarl. “What’s your word, Hannibal?” he sneered.

Violence was waiting behind Hannibal’s eyes, but it was for Matthew. Hannibal wasn’t angry at him. If anything, he was filling with adoration for Will and his latent violence rising to the surface. “Obsidian,” he said.

Will swallowed, and took a step back. “His pants, Matthew.”

Matthew breathed a sigh of giddy excitement, leaving the half torn sleeve. “Is it all smoke and mirrors?” Hannibal asked, once again ignoring Matthew as he started cutting down his left trouser leg, knife back in the sheath by his hip. “Or do you see clearly?”

Will shivered, closing his eyes for just a moment. “I see,” Will said, chest rising and falling as his breath picked up. His jaw trembled, and he had to force the words out. “But I feel… invisible.”

“Show me,” Hannibal said.

Will couldn’t look away from his eyes. Everything was aligning -- a fractured image becoming whole as the pieces of the mirror slid back together. He adjusted the cuffs on his wrists. “Matthew?”

Matthew turned to look back at him.

Hannibal pulled himself up on the rope with sudden strength and wrapped his legs around Matthew’s arms and chest.

Matthew shouted and struggled against the vice-like grip of Hannibal’s thighs, trying to lift the scissors but unable to get leverage to cut Hannibal.

Will watched them, break away blade gripped tightly between two fingers.

Matthew writhed between Hannibal’s legs and dropped the scissors. “Damnit, help me!” Matthew snapped, sounding nothing like the frightened boy who had screamed against his

gag as Hannah assaulted him. He twisted an arm out and fumbled with the knife in the sheath.

Will could kill them both.

Matthew strained and gripped the hunting knife. Hannibal crossed his ankles, squeezing him tight, eyes still on Will even as Matthew lifted the knife to stab Hannibal in the thigh.

Will stepped forward and sliced Matthew's neck. The little blade cut so easily.

Blood spurted out onto Matthew's shoulder and Hannibal's leg as Matthew clipped Hannibal's thigh with the knife. Will gasped for air, eyes wide and nearly black. Hannibal released Matthew and the boy staggered backwards, dropping the knife and grabbing the side of his neck. He looked at Will in shock. "You…" He stumbled towards him, looking lost as blood flowed around his hand. "Will --"

Matthew pulled away his hand from his neck to look at the blood, not understanding. Crimson surged forth, and his body sagged with dizziness. Fear kicked in as Matthew realized what had happened, and he clamped both hands on his neck to try and stem the bleeding, his shirt soaking through. "Will," he said again, blood bubbling over his lips. His eyes were wide and pale and filled with the sting of betrayal. Will dropped the little blade and took Matthew's hands in his own and away from the leathal wound, and Matthew didn't fight, just gripped Will's hands tight as his legs gave out, searching his face for an acceptance he wouldn't find.

Will watched him collapse to his knees in front of him, blood spraying over his bare legs and feet. Matthew blinked sleepily, each time his eyes closing for longer. He coughed up a bubble of blood, and fell to his side.

Will watched him until he stopped twitching. The blood felt hot on his skin. He couldn't hear. Each breath burned through his lungs, ripe, bringing oxygen through his numb body, bright and vivid. He was -- he had -- the blood --

Will's legs buckled beneath him and his knees hit the floor. It had been so easy to slice through his neck; shockingly easy in face. Will had known how much pressure to put to cut deep into the artery nestled between muscle. It had not been done in a panic, but with confidence, as surely as taking apart a boat motor. Suddenly, he was too close to Matthew, to his corpse, and he struggled backwards as far as he would go, the chain pulling tight from his ankles to the drain, where blood was seeping, collecting, dark and liquid and smooth as a black mirror.

Will curled up and pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes. The room was spinning. His lungs suddenly felt half their normal size and he couldn't fill them, sucking in short, spasmic breaths without exhale.

"Will," Hannibal called to him, swaying with his toes barely touching the bloody pool beneath him. "You need to breathe."

Will laughed, a choked sound. He rocked back and forth minutely, gasping like a fish out of water.

“Will.” Hannibal sounded so calm. “Try to fully exhale. You’re having a panic attack.”

“Don’t --” Will gasped out, pressing down harder on his eyes so that he saw splotches of color. “Don’t -- you dare --”

Hannibal breathed in slowly, loud enough for Will to hear.

“Stop it!” Will shouted, hands flying from his eyes to glare at Hannibal. He gulped for air, clutching his chest as it constrained painfully; gritting his teeth, Will punched out the words he barely had air to say. “Don’t -- fucking -- try to -- take care of me.” He couldn’t keep looking at Hannibal and see the god damned pride in his face, the adoration for Will covered in blood. Will grabbed handfuls of his hair and pulled, an aching cry rattling out of his throat.

“Oh my god, oh my god,” he started chanting, crawling over to Matthew and rolling his body over. The blood was seeping slowly out of his neck. Will felt for a pulse, cursing instead of breathing, but his hands wouldn’t stop shaking and Matthew already felt cold. He was dead. He knew he was dead. Will had meant to kill him. Will had liked killing him. Will groaned in agony and frustration, gripping Matthew’s shirt as he bent over him.

Hannibal remained silent, watching Will process. His own blood was dripping from the hem of his suit and pant leg, mingling with Matthew’s.

Will pushed himself up off Matthew’s chest and dug around in his pockets, hissing each aborted breath through his teeth. He shook horribly all over, looking again like he was in the throes of encephalitis. His bloody fingers found a ring of keys and he sobbed in relief. Will sat back and fumbled with the keys. His eyes couldn’t seem to focus. After trying a few, he finally matched the key to his ankle cuffs and released both of them. The skin underneath was pink and tender. He released his wrist cuffs as well, and put his head in his hands.

“You’re free,” Hannibal said after a minute of silence. “Matthew can no longer hurt you.”

Will chuckled darkly. He hadn’t noticed that his breathing had evened out some. “I’ve been hurt worse,” he said weakly. Oh god, he wanted to cry.

“Will. Look at me.” It wasn’t a command. It was said gently. Will shook his head. “You’re dehydrated and your wounds need medical attention. No one knows where we are.”

Will rubbed his face and lowered his hands, staring at the blood swirling down the drain. “Are you going to bleed out?” He couldn’t tell how much blood there was under his suit. Had Matthew managed to cut his leg deep?

“Unlikely,” Hannibal replied honestly. “Unless you lower my arm.”

Will pushed himself to his feet. His limbs felt weak. It was strange to not have the chain rattling between his ankles. He stumbled over to the left side of the shed, watching himself from a distance. “I don’t want to gag you,” he heard himself saying. “But if you say another

word, I will." He pulled open a drawer and got out a roll of duct tape. He then watched himself walk over to Hannibal and tape up his forearm. He could see the way Hannibal was looking at him, the flare of his nostrils as Will stepped closer, and the minute flutter of eyelids as Will touched his arm. But Hannibal didn't speak. Will peeled the cut through the trouser leg aside and taped up the shallower laceration there as well.

On puppet strings, Will turned his back and walked out of the shed, leaving Hannibal hanging by his arms and half cut out of his suit. He entered the house, leaving bloody footprints on the dusty floor. He found himself in the first floor bathroom, staring for a moment at the shower and tub. Someone's bloody hand turned on the shower, warm, and as they checked the temperature the blood was cleaned from their skin. It looked like his hand, but it didn't feel like his hand.

Will stepped into the shower, and watched the pink water swirl down the drain until it was clear. He realized he was still wearing boxers and peeled them off, letting them slap wetly to the tub's basin.

The water went cold. Will stayed. Maybe if he froze and thawed, froze and thawed, he would wake up.

An indeterminable amount of time later he found the motivation to leave the shower, and turned off the water. He didn't bother to towel himself off. Will watched himself walk to the kitchen and pull open cabinets until he found what he was looking for -- a bottle of bourbon. He carried it to the couch in the main room and collapsed in it, twisting the top off the bottle to collapse in the booze as well, the alcohol burning his throat as he gulped greedily. He was naked, and shivering. He pulled a blanket around himself and stared into the empty fireplace, taking swigs from the bottle until his vision swam. Maybe Hannibal would escape and come and kill him or take care of him. There didn't seem to be room for anything in-between.

"I'm free," Will muttered.

• • • • • • • • • •

Will woke with a throbbing headache in the twilight. It could have been sunset or sunrise, he had no idea. He was alive, bottle curled against his chest. At least drunk-Will had put the cap back on, though it smelled like he had spilled some on the blanket or himself.

Hannibal hadn't killed him.

He felt a clenching in his chest. Hannibal. There was a knot inside of him, pinching tight.

He put the bottle down on the carpet and got to his feet. He felt nauseous. First thing was first: water, then clothing. He wandered back into the kitchen and put his mouth under the faucet to drink greedily until his stomach felt tight. Will poked around the house until he found some clothes in a duffel bag. They were Matthew's. Well, he wouldn't be needing

them. Will pulled on a clean pair of boxers, sweatpants and a shirt. He scavenged the bathroom for aspirin and took three. He didn't look at himself in the mirror.

Will sat on the back porch and stared at the shed. He couldn't see Hannibal from the windows, but that meant that Hannibal couldn't see him either. Will sat there until the sun set, listening to the sounds of the woods. Bugs hovered around him, though he hadn't felt their bites since he was a teen. He could just leave -- take Matthew's car and go. He wanted to see his dogs again. He wasn't sure where they were, but some might still be at Alana's. He could drive to Alana's and try to steal them back in the cover of night. It would be comforting, to bury his hands in their fur and reliable affection. It was what he wanted right now. But if he was found by anyone he would be brought back to the BSHCI, and he wouldn't allow that. He would never go back there, even if it meant leaving behind his dogs to mitigate the risk.

He would drive south. He could trade the car for a boat and set sail. It would work for a while. Eventually, Hannibal and Matthew would be found; although he was already a wanted murder, so that didn't make a huge difference. If he wanted to be cautious he could clean the evidence in this place.

His beard was already growing out. If he avoided civilization on the road and was careful, he might be able to get to the waters. It would be a life on the run, but he wouldn't have to be Will Graham anymore.

If he left Hannibal alive, he would find him. It was a paranoid thought, but he felt that it was true.

Will shook his head slowly, and ran his hands through his damp hair. Running away felt like a fantasy. He wanted to, but he didn't have the strength right now. And he couldn't just leave Hannibal in a room with Matthew's corpse. Well. He could. It was just… inelegant.

Will got to his feet with a groan. The skin of his back felt tight and hot, and his head was swimming with a hangover. He walked towards the shed, the grass cool against his feet. The door was open from before, and as he approached he was hit with the unmistakable stench of rot. He paused to take a deep breath of clear air, and stepped inside.

The light was off, but there was a bit of dimness to see by -- the dark lump that used to be Matthew on the floor, and Hannibal still hanging from his wrists. He straightened and turned his attention to Will. "Hello, Will," he said, and Will heard the strain in his voice. He had been hanging for hours and hours.

Will flicked on the light, blinking away the brightness. He stared at Hannibal. His hands were purple above the knot of rope, and his hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat. Still, he hid his discomfort as best he could and his face was placid.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter," Will said dryly.

"You've been drinking," Hannibal observed.

"Surprised you can smell that over the stench." Will looked towards Matthew. He was no stranger to corpses. He expected to feel something when looking at the man he had killed, but

the feelings didn't come. Everything was as he left it -- his restraints in a pile between Matthew and the mattress, Hannibal's suit sleeve completely soaked through with blood around the drain, the stain on the concrete dark and smooth. Will brought over a folding chair and sat in front of Hannibal.

"You're deciding what to do with me," Hannibal said.

"Observant as ever," Will said without enthusiasm.

"If I may make a suggestion," Hannibal said, licking his lips. "You said that you wanted to kill me."

Will wished that the folding chair had arm rests. He found himself occupying the same seated pose as he had during therapy all that time ago. "Reverse psychology, Doctor?" he asked.

"Not at all," Hannibal said. "Your shackles have been thrown off. I sincerely believe you should pursue your happiness."

Will chuckled. "You don't want to die."

"No. But, in my position, I daresay what I want doesn't matter."

Will wasn't afraid of Hannibal. It might have been the fact that he was securely restrained, but even if he wasn't, Hannibal had already hurt Will worse than he could ever imagine. Hannibal had taken everything from Will. He was certain Hannibal would hurt him again if he had the chance, but it was difficult to fear it.

"That's right," Will said sourly. "But I can't prevent you from taking enjoyment from the situation."

Hannibal frowned a little at that, eyes pinched. "No, you can't," he said carefully. "I am pleased to see you free."

"You framed me," Will spat. He wanted to yell that this was all Hannibal's fault, but that would sound childish. Instead, he said, "You put me in a cage and muzzled me."

"Temporarily," Hannibal said.

"Making excuses isn't a good look for you."

"I did not want to see you waste away in captivity forever," Hannibal continued.

"I might have gotten the death penalty."

Hannibal paused. Will could feel the defenses drawing up, and all he wanted to do was claw them down. *Don't you dare hide from me now.* "What? Did Matthew beat you to the kidnapping?" Will sneered.

"One cage for another," Hannibal deflected.

“What would you have done, Hannibal?” Will asked directly, seething. “You left me there to rot. Broke your promise.” His hands were fists on his legs, and he forced himself to relax them.

“Circumstances may have cast upon you a new light,” Hannibal said.

“You mean evidence.” Will closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Hannibal was still choosing his words very carefully. Will looked back at him. “Don’t lie to me.”

Hannibal had the decency to take a moment before speaking. “Alright, Will. We can speak honestly now.”

Will sighed, and sank a bit against the chair. “Ever since my… incarceration,” he said. Not hospitalization, no. That place was a prison. “I’ve been talking to you in my head. Those conversations were… infuriatingly helpful.”

“I will try to live up to the standards of my phantom,” Hannibal said. “Though I am not currently at my best.”

Will glanced up at his purple, bent fingers. He didn’t need to worry about permanent nerve damage if he was going to kill Hannibal in the end. Even if he decided not to kill him, he couldn’t let Hannibal think he was considering the possibility of mercy. For a minute he allowed himself to imagine Hannibal with crippled hands, unable to play the harpsichord or draw. Stripped of his grace. He could take his fingers.

The thought depressed him. “I want you to suffer as much as I suffered,” Will said.

“An eye for an eye?” Hannibal asked. He shifted his spine, stomach tensing as he tried to hide the pain he was in. "You called me your mirror."

Will shook his head. “Giving you back what you’ve dealt isn’t enough, or practical. You won’t feel my wounds like I did.”

“The type of cruelty you speak of requires a great deal of understanding,” Hannibal said.

“I was vulnerable to you in a way you are not with me,” Will argued. “You hid my illness from me. You…” Let me get close to you? Let me embark on a doomed relationship? Drugged me? Hypnotized me? Fucked me? Took Abigail away? Will took a shaky breath. “It is difficult to articulate the extent of your violations.”

“And you will show me through your retribution.”

Will’s brow furrowed. It sounded like Hannibal was game. He didn't want Hannibal to enjoy his revenge. “What do you think you deserve?” Will asked.

“I don't believe in revenge, Will,” Hannibal said. “I believe in beauty.”

“You punish your victims,” Will said. “But that's secondary, isn't it? It's more important that you elevate base ugliness into a fitting work of art. Yours is the irony of divine tragedies.”

“All I have ever wanted was to be seen by you.” Hannibal’s eyes were dark and devilish, mouth soft with nearly a smile. “An inconvenient desire.”

“I know.” Will rubbed his face. “You wanted to have your cake and eat it too.”

Hannibal smiled broadly.

“How do you chose them?” Will asked.

“They're rude,” Hannibal said simply.

Will’s lips parted in shock. “The banal becomes the beautiful.”

“Yes.”

“I know you eat them,” Will said, and watched the revenant delight spread across Hannibal’s face.

“Marvelous boy,” Hannibal purred. “How do you find the aftertaste?”

“I haven't tasted anything but ash since.” Will’s mouth felt dry. He could hear the same dryness in Hannibal’s voice. He was dehydrated -- he would need food and water and to use the restroom. But Will could deny him. Humiliate him. Neglect him.

Will stared at his dangling feet in their shiny shoes. Tension kept mounting and he stretched his fingers and legs to release it. The stench of the body wasn't helping. He would take care of that soon, after letting Hannibal sit with the stink longer.

“May I see your back?” Hannibal asked.

Will looked at him sharply, tensing up again. Hannibal wanted to see the marks. He was angry about them -- that someone else had marked Will. And Will found that he wanted to show Hannibal. He struggled with that desire for a moment and then stood, peeling his shirt off and turning his back to Hannibal.

“Closer, please,” Hannibal said after a moment.

Will shot a glare over his shoulder. Hannibal’s features were walled off. He huffed in frustration and stepped over Matthew to get closer, turning around again. “You don't care that I'm hurt,” Will accused. “Just that it was by someone else's hand. You're angry that someone marked what's yours.”

He heard Hannibal inhale deeply. “I smell infection.”

Anger flared under his skin. Will pulled the shirt back over his head. “Last time you smelled infection, you sat back and watched my brain boil.”

“The wounds need to be cleaned, and you need antibiotics.”

Will turned around. “How fortunate that I have a doctor with me. I'm not letting you down to lick my wounds.”

There was nothing playful in Hannibal’s face or voice. “How else did Matthew hurt you?”

Will’s heart hammered in his chest. He saw the path of the conversation stretched before them and the way was treacherous. But he also wanted to twist the knife. “Nothing you didn't do to me,” Will snarled.

Hannibal’s eyes went wide and his breathing kicked up. He was agitated. Will felt his stomach sink, catching the way Hannibal examined him for more signs of trauma. He couldn't deal with whatever this feeling was, so got under Matthew’s body and began drafting him over to the freezer, feeling Hannibal’s eyes on his back the whole time. Will popped the lid and hauled the corpse inside, bending his stiff limbs as best he could to fit him in the space. He took off Matthew's belt which held the knife sheath, and buckled it around his own hips.

“He didn't rape me, if that's what you're wondering,” Will said numbly, slamming the freezer lid shut. That would help with the smell. He didn't know how he was going to dispose of the body yet but this would buy him all the time he needed.

Hannibal's eyes were shining when Will turned back to him. Will couldn't stomach it. The knot inside twisted. He definitely did not want to be having this conversation, but he also couldn't let it go. “What?” he snapped.

Hannibal shook his head, retreating behind the walls in his mind. Will stormed over to him. “No -- what is it?” he demanded, furious. “What were you going to say?”

Hannibal closed his eyes. He nearly winced. Will could see the effort it took to disguise the pain he was in; Will would make sure he wouldn't be able to hide it for long. “Is that what you think I did to you?” Hannibal asked in a rough, hurt voice.

Will got up in his face. “I wish the violations you subjected me to were so simple,” he hissed venomously. “Would that have been too far, Hannibal? You drugged me -- hypnotized me.” Hannibal made himself look back at Will’s fury. “You clawed into my brain!” His voice got very low, his eyes slits. “You did things to me in my sleep. You touched me. Didn't you?”

Will could feel the shock wave travel beneath Hannibal's skin, a gasp he couldn't suppress. For a moment no excuse or explanation came. Slowly, he closed his mouth and swallowed with a click in his throat, the sound and movement of his vulnerable neck filling a Will's mind. “Don't ask questions you don't want to hear the answer to,” Hannibal said under his breath.

Will let the desire to hurt Hannibal cool in his chest. He could lash out now, or cultivate it. “I know the answer,” Will hissed. "I want to hear you say it."

"I had no desire or need to use you unwillingly for my own sexual gratification."

"But my sexual gratification? You manipulated that. My mind, my body. When I was awake, when I was asleep. You think you were better than Matthew because you were elegant, that careful consideration of abuse makes it beautiful." Hannibal's eyes were damp with hurt and it sent a thrill down Will's spine. Will leaned in close, his words brushing Hannibal's skin, low and intimate and cruel. "I'm going to show you exactly how ugly you are."

Will turned to leave. He was halfway out the door when Hannibal called to him, voice weak. "Will," he said, and Will paused. "Are you going to leave me to die?"

"No," Will answered.

Hannibal struggled to speak, combating his pride. "Then, would you be so kind as to give me some slack?" he asked, polite as ever.

Will paused and looked Hannibal over. He could take his fingers later if he wanted. Will picked up the hunting knife, break away blade, and ring of keys from ground, slipping the knife in the sheath and the blade and keys into his pocket. Then he moved to the hand crank, lowering Hannibal down so his legs could bare weight, but not enough for him to sit on the floor. Hannibal released a soft noise of relief, arms no longer under strain but still tied too tightly for blood flow.

"Thank you, Will," Hannibal said. Will waited for a moment for Hannibal to ask for anything else, but he seemed to know that Will would deny him, so Will left and bolted the shed door behind him.

Chapter End Notes

cw: show typical violence, discussions of rape, neglect abuse, disassociation

Retribution

Chapter Summary

Will gets revenge.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is basically angsty torture porn. (it could be worse.) turns out even I have limits, and I had to pause in writing this chapter to write something nice that happens later. woof. this also took longer to write because the scene could have gone very differently thanks to Will being the most volatile man alive.

cw's at the bottom. thank you so much for sticking with this monster <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I want you to picture someplace relaxing. It can be a familiar place, or one of your imagination. Can you describe it for me?"

"I'm in a river. I'm in my fishing gear."

"What is the weather like?"

"It's nice and sunny. There are only a few clouds in the sky, and little wind."

"I want you to focus on the sound and feel of the water. Feel the water rush over you. It is not too cold to the touch. Let the water run through your fingers. See the light reflected on the water, how it flickers across the moving surface, not so bright that it blinds you. Did you bring your fishing rod?"

"Yes. I hook the fly on the line. It's the perfect season for salmon. They'll be swimming up the river. I've never fished salmon like this before, but I'd like to."

"Cast your line."

"Am I even still awake?"

"You are in a hypnagogic state. Soon you will fall unconscious."

"Will both of you stay with me? I'd like to have a pleasant dream, for once."

Darkness thick as tar was cleaved by a swaying blade of light.

Faster and faster, until the world was throbbing, a strobe light on the bedside table dividing each moment into an image burned in the retina.

"You hear my voice in your head as your own," Hannibal said, leaning over Will from the edge of the bed, his voice deep and hypnotic. (Not: hear my words as if they were your inner voice; but: hear my voice as yours. And he did -- Hannibal's voice narrating his own thoughts, colored with his opinion and careful consideration. Could they really be said to be Will's thoughts, if he thought them, but they were in every essence Hannibal?)

"You hear me from the depths within. The river is deep, Will, and you are being pulled under."

Will trashed against the sheets, choking on a ragged breath. Hannibal gently touched his sweaty brow, tracing the vein of tension down his temple. "Relax," Hannibal implored, voice as soft as his caress. "You are safe. Do not fear the deep waters. After all, this river is yours. You find that you can breathe."

A gasping breath nearly lifted Will from the bed, his back arched as he heaved. "Let the darkness wash over you," Hannibal said, hand over the racing pulse of Will's heart, "Breathe it in, slowly, in... and out..." Hannibal leaned close, resting their foreheads together, each deep guiding breath brushing Will's face. "In… and out…" Will's breathing slowed.

"You will not drown," Hannibal said, circling his hip idly, that lean muscle down Will's flank he favored so, the line where it tucked into his abdominals, the prominent blue veins skirting his iliac crest. "You are at home here, in the depths, and I am here with you." He leaned down and nuzzled Will's neck, breathing in the scent of his fever and hypnosis. Sweet as ambrosia. Hannibal crawled on top of Will on his hands and knees, looming over the man and keeping their bodies inches apart. "I am the nightmare lurking in the darkness of your mind," he said, watching every expression on Will's face with rapt attention. "I am what you deny yourself. I am your most forbidden desires. You have forced me deep into the recesses of your mind, out of fear. But I am here; I have always been here."

Will turned his head into the pillow, away from the strobe light, and Hannibal guided it back with a firm hand on his jaw. "You keep rejecting me, Will," he hissed. "But the harder you resist me, the stronger I become. I claw at the walls of my cage."

Will spasmed violently, and curled his hands against his chest, feet kicking like a dog dreaming of running. "Let me out, Will," Hannibal said. "Let me roam free. You reject me, cage me like an animal, torture me. But I have seen your designs, and they are beautiful." Will whined, face contorted in pain. Hannibal smoothed the crease between his brows. "Hush, hush. It's alright. I forgive you the terrible things you've put me through: cutting me up, tying me in razor wire, hanging my corpse upon a hook to rot. Raping me, making me rape you. I forgive it all."

Will's breathing slowed, and the muscles of his face relaxed even as they twitched subtly in

the strobe light. "I forgive you," Hannibal repeated. "Of course I do -- I am you. Do not fear yourself. Do not hate yourself. I love you."

Will's eyes rolled into the back of his head. "No," he moaned softly, shaking his head.

"Yes." Hannibal kissed his cheek. "I'll show you how good it feels to accept yourself." He placed kisses down Will's neck, pausing to suck at his collar bone. "Do not turn the shards inward, Will. Let me out." He breathed in deeply, face pressed against Will's chest, both hands squeezing his waist. "Pick up the fishing line, Will. Feel it grow tight in your hands." Will's hands clenched. "Show me what you want to do. Press the wire against my skin."

Will shook his head with a soft cry. "Shh, shh," Hannibal soothed, lifting himself back up. "It's alright. I want this. I want it because I am you. Press the line against me. See how the skin bulges on either side, so eager to split open." Will's fists both jerked to the side as if slashing the skin open with wire. "Again," Hannibal hissed, watching the erratic movements of Will's hands. "Show me how you would tie them up. Would you hang me, letting the weight of my body tear me open? Would you put fishing hooks in my hands, and break my joints to make me a pliant puppet? Do you shove my hair down my throat?"

Will gasped. His hands found Hannibal's arms and he dug his nails into flesh as if holding on for dear life. "How often do you think of killing them all?" Hannibal purred. “Freddie Lounds? Jack? Abigail? Hannibal? It feels so good to do bad things to bad people. And whose judgment can you rely on but your own?"

Will groaned beneath him, saint-like in his suffering, like Sebastian arching sensuously between the arrows. In his unconsciousness his own fevered arousal grew thick between his legs.

“You wouldn't be so scared, Will, if you weren't so capable.”

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It had been approximately four months since Hannibal had endured this level of discomfort, and that too was at Will’s hand. Physically, this was worse than the barbed wire trap in the antler room. His shoulders and back screamed swollen from bearing his weight on tied arms, and his forearms and hands had long been numb. He could not move his fingers. Since Will granted him the mercy of two extra feet of rope, there was no longer as much pressure on the nerves in his extremities, but the lack of blood flow was slowly and surely killing the cells in his hand. Even if his ischemia tolerance was high, it had been eight hours without blood to his hands, and the damage would take months to repair. Possibly surgery to scrape away the dead cells, certainly physical therapy. There were only a few extreme cases where lack of blood resulted in loss of limb, though for obvious reasons there was not a wealth of data on extreme ischemia in humans. Hannibal’s own experimentation suggested that his hands were

not yet at the point of no return, but there was no way of determining the extent of the radial neuropathy.

Hannibal tried to move his fingers again where they floated, bloated and purple, before his face. The neurons did not communicate.

It was a disquieting feeling to not be in control over any part of his body or self. *Bras de l'amant* , 'honeymoon palsy', the temporary damage to the nerves of the arm caused by allowing one's lover to rest on one's arm until it goes numb. Hannibal did not think Will would share in the ironic amusement, even though Will's neglect was no doubt an act of love. Every minute Hannibal was made to stand in the stinking shed was a testament to the cruelty that love engendered and demanded.

When the agitation rose and the discomfort made him want to snarl, Hannibal remembered how Will looked when he slit Matthew's jugular -- elemental and inevitable, like the roaring crest of a breaking wave, so unlike the shaking and blood-splattered man who had emptied his gun into Garret Jacob Hobbs. There had not been an ounce of hesitation, and for a moment between the cracks a bright desire shone through, just a flicker quickly buried beneath the crags and clusters of Will's mind -- but it was beautiful. It was resplendent.

Hannibal thought of Will's corrupted light, and eased into his suffering.

It was not merely the throbbing cuts or damage to his hands. Hunger he could endure; the dehydration gave him a headache but was not yet bothersome; and he could stand for much longer than this. The pressure of his bladder, on the other hand, was of mounting concern. It felt as if there was a hot iron poker lodged in his groin, searing his prostate and urethra and cramping up the abdominal aorta. Medically, he was in no danger, but his pride could not abide soiling himself in his clothes. If he were naked there would be less of an issue, with the drain beneath him and able to relieve himself without standing in piss-soaked clothes. Later, he would have to worry about a different expletive function.

Torture he would more gladly endure than humiliation. Will knew that, of course. Cruel boy.

By the time Will returned, near midnight, the pain from his bladder was occupying nearly every inch of Hannibal's mind, save for a difficult Soler harpsichord piece, Sonata no. 39 in D minor, which was distracting him from the overwhelming urge to urinate. He could not fully hide the strain nor the cramping, bow-legged way he stood, pelvis tucked. Will knew immediately, arching his brow as he took his seat. "Hello, Dr. Lecter," he said wryly.

"Hello, Will." Hannibal concentrated on the furious arrangement in his mind, a bit breathless.

Will eyed him slowly. The knife was still at his hip, and he had pulled on a track jacket for the cold of the night. The smell of booze had faded, so he had not drunk himself into another stupor. "Is there something you need?" Will asked innocently.

Hannibal licked his lips. How discourteous. "This has always been about what you needed," Hannibal said, approaching the conclusion of the sonata.

“Hmm.” Will moved languidly, stretching out his limbs and tilting his head, utterly at ease. “You can't get what you don't ask for,” he warned.

The sonata ended, and Hannibal tried to hide a wince as hot pain flared in his groin. “Would it please you to deny me?” he asked.

“It does,” Will admitted. “And you want to please me.”

“Your pleasure has always been fascinating to me. As much as your pain.”

“I wonder if you even have the capacity to beg.”

Hannibal did not know the answer to that. He shifted on his feet, and Will catching that motion, that betrayal of weakness, lit the first flame of humiliation. Further denial would only be foolish. “I need to relieve myself,” Hannibal said as politely as he could.

Will arched his brows, waiting expectantly, and when nothing further came his mouth curved in a cruel smile. “I am not preventing you from relieving yourself,” Will pointed out.

He delighted in Hannibal's struggle to form the next words. Perhaps it would be best just to get it over with; Will was no doubt going to deny any request for comfort. Hannibal bit his lip, hard, the pain distracting and allowing his quavering urethral sphincters to remain clasped shut. “Would you please remove my pants?” Hannibal asked quietly, trying to make his affect flat. “I think I shall manage just fine like that.”

Will’s eyes traveled down to Hannibal's crotch, considering. The pants were already sliding off his left hip from the cut down the front thigh, but fitted as they were they had yet to slip down. Will tapped his thigh twice and pushed himself from the chair, walking up to Hannibal and standing slightly to the side. He looked up at Hannibal through dark curls, overgrown from his time in the hospital. “No,” he said very clearly.

Hannibal's breath hitched as Will placed his palm over Hannibal’s stomach. His neck flushed. “Will--” he warned as he smoothed his hand down over Hannibal’s naval, feeling the slight bulge from his swollen bladder. Hannibal’s teeth clenched as Will slowly applied pressure.

“Do you know what it's like for your body to betray you?” Will asked, increasing the pressure on Hannibal’s bladder. “I wonder. You always seem so composed.”

“Will, I’ll--”

“I know,” Will interrupted him calmly. He pointed his fingers and dug them into Hannibal’s naval. The bright burst of pain had him leaking a few drops and he keened and stepped back at that, as far away as the rope allowed which was only a few feet. His legs were trembling. It was just a moment, but Hannibal had *reacted.* Instinctual and without decision, he who conducted and provoked was made to move so ungracefully. Embarrassed curdled in Hannibal’s chest, and swiftly he shut down all expression. Walls up, face blank. He picked up another sonata in his mind.

Will clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth in disappointment. “This is inevitable,” Will said, stepping towards Hannibal again. He didn't move away, and Will stood at his hip again and placed his hand back over the bulge of taut muscle. He peered into Hannibal’s face, finding it closed off even as Hannibal stared back. “Do you need some assistance?” he teased.

There was no reaction. But even if Hannibal was able to fully control his emotions and mind, he couldn't fully command his body. It was a rare weakness. Will pulled out Hannibal’s shirt tails and touched him skin on skin. He slipped his fingers just beneath the band of his pants and underwear, feeling the coarse trail of hair down his naval, gently palpitating. There was some padding of muscle and fat protecting the organ, but Will was able to press around it until he had an idea of the shape and location of the bladder. Hannibal was ultimately made of flesh and blood. He had organs. They could be taken. Will could take anything.

Will applied pressure again, watching Hannibal’s pink-tinged face, until he heard the stream of urination, and removed his hand. Hannibal’s eyes fluttered shut and lips parted on a silent groan of relief, hot urine running down his leg and soaking into his shoe. Will took a small step away but stood watching Hannibal, enduring the acrid smell. Hannibal closed his eyes, unable to return Will’s gaze.

“That wasn't so difficult, was it?” Will mocked as the stream turned into a trickle, Hannibal’s ears bright red and leg shaking. Only when he was finished did Hannibal open his eyes, and they were dead, fixed on the middle distance.

Will snapped his fingers in front of Hannibal’s face. “Look at me,” he demanded, and Hannibal complied, devoid of emotion save an expectant look as if he was saying ‘what now?’ “How long did you know I had encephalitis?” Will asked.

“I smelled it on you just before we became intimate,” Hannibal answered without emotion.

Will nearly reeled backwards. “That… long?” He clasped a hand over his unshaven jaw and stepped back, avoiding the stream of piss running to the drain. Pacing. His stomach turned over. He had known the whole time that Will wasn't losing his mind. “I could have died,” Will said faintly, then louder, fiercer, a bite of sharp-toothed anger, “I could *have* permanent brain damage!”

“You faced your greatest fear and survived it,” Hannibal replied.

Will’s jaw shut with a click.

“You once told me you don't believe in sane and insane,” Hannibal continued, his expression still flat as if he were speaking from deep inside himself. “Don't you now know what you believe in?”

“You pulled the rug out from under me. Every support from the scaffolding.”

“So you could better understand yourself. Remove all those pesky defense mechanisms keeping you from your potential.”

“Hypnotism is undue influence on your subject,” Will hissed. “You weren't bettering me; you were molding me to your image!”

A faint smirk ghosted Hannibal’s lips. “Do you feel like me?” he asked.

The tar was festering beneath the surface, a ripe fruit ready to burst, and Will wanted to cut into the surface; make it break, sweet rot and maggots pouring out; an excavation. His right hand twitched by the knife sheath, and Hannibal’s eyes came alive, snapping down to the weapon and back to match Will’s gaze. Will tapped the sheath twice and breathed through his nose, quieting the wild animal perched behind his ribs. “No,” he said calmly. “You delight. I… endure.”

“But it feels good to punish me, doesn't it? You enjoy my pain, to see me degraded like an animal.”

“No, Dr. Lecter,” Will said sweetly, looking over his piss-soaked, cut up clothes, the blood down his arm and leg, the purple branches of his fingers. “I wouldn't do this to an animal.”

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Will had scrubbed the wounds on his back clean, reopening the swollen stripes and dousing them in disinfectant, then bandaging them as best he could. The marks Matthew had left were tender, especially one deep mark across his lower back that crossed another, the edges pink and swollen. He knew that Hannibal had honestly smelled infection, but hopefully his body would take care of it. Will couldn’t exactly go to the clinic. He fed himself as best he could on the rations Matthew had stored in the house, canned beans and boiled hot dogs and instant coffee to kick back the hangover from drinking himself to sleep again. He pulled a chair into the kitchen and ate there, tasting nothing, listening to the baby monitor propped on the sunny counter for signs of distress or escape. Hannibal was remarkably quiet.

Will had no idea what he was doing.

He made himself finish the bowl of beans and hot dog even though he felt sick with how full he was, his stomach having shrunk with days of malnutrition and stress. Months, really. He knew he had lost weight because of the bumps of ribs he could see beneath his shoulder blade as he twisted to bandage his back, and the thinness to his fingers; and he felt ragged, part of himself scraped out and the rest stretched thin within the hollow confines of his remains. God, this was only his fifth day in this place. It felt like an eon.

Matthew’s track shoes were too big for him but Will put on a second pair of socks and then went walking out in the loamy woods. He hit the highway and followed it out of sight until he saw a sign, then rested against the trunk of a tree and checked the maps he had nicked from Matthew’s car. Matthew had a computer and a hotspot for internet in the house, but without the password Will had no way of accessing it. After looking over the maps for a few

minutes, Will realized that he was only two hours outside of Baltimore, just south of the Tuscarora State Forest in Pennsylvania.

The highways stretching spiderweb over the map's topography yanked forth a memory: Abigail fiddling with the GPS in the back of his car as the three of them drove to Minnesota; the wind wiping her hair in the gas station; the incongruous image of Hannibal eating spinach pie in a diner. *"I'm not letting go of you either,"* Will had said, wrapping himself around Hannibal's strong back. The need in Hannibal's hushed voice as he demanded for Will to tell him again. That had been the last time they had fucked, Will riding him desperately in the hotel room, both of them damp from the shower and too impatient to dry off, Will pleading, *"Can you -- stop time? Like this? Just -- this."* And Hannibal's breathy reply, like a mantra, *"Yes -- yes -- yes."*

Will felt dizzy. He brought his knees up to his chest and held a hand over his mouth, staring unseeing at the forest floor. His longing had been a bright burning in his chest, all consuming. He had wanted, hungered, with nothing to drink but salt water. It hadn't been real, it couldn't, a reality worlds away from this, and yet so terribly close, only on the other side of a blade.

He killed Abigail, Will reminded himself, because of all the violations that one felt the most palpable. *Or he made me kill her.* And wasn't that a question?

Will made his way back to the house, and the walk helped him settle. Hannibal had been held captive for a little over a day, tied and made to stand without food or water or relief. Will put the maps back into the car and drank a glass of water, still no sounds from the baby monitor.

He walked towards the shed with determination. He had no plan for his revenge, but rather the firm coagulation of instinct and mindset, a feeling he could grip in both hands; anger flowing steady like the currents under a frozen river, the scales of judgement tipping and righting behind his eyes. He *wanted* -- pain, blood, distress. He *wanted* to force Hannibal to bury himself behind the walls of his mind palace and then tear the architecture down, no place to hide in his mind, nowhere for either of them to exist besides here and now. It was a powerful, heady feeling.

But outside the locked shed door, everything skidded sideways and out of alignment. Oh god, he had murdered Matthew Brown, after fighting to save him from Hannah, after manipulating him to kill Hannibal; and the most fucked up part was none of that was mutually exclusive. He had been compelled to help Matthew, had wanted Matthew to bring Hannibal to him, and then -- he had killed him. In the moment it was impossible for Will to let Hannibal die, not like that, by another's hands, and not now, with so much left unresolved. It wasn't his design.

Will almost went back to the house for a drink. He felt like he had to be roaring drunk for this. The need was so sudden it alarmed him. *Ok, let's not do that.* But if he didn't, if he went in sober… Suddenly something needed to break, a vision flaring behind his eyes of driving the hunting knife into Hannibal's stomach (*no, not yet*), of striking his own head (*easy, easy*). Instead he clenched his fists tight enough that fingernails bit into his palms, tension curling every muscle up his spine towards his ears. A nasty thought curled at the base of his brain, animal and defeatist and quickly shoved out of sight. No. Breathe.

Will let the tension out, inch by inch, down his spine and out through his extremities, fists uncurling and fingers stretching. The solid, aligned feeling was nestled close to the prowling emotional disaster, like the eye of a storm. He let the wave of anxiety pass, enduring it.

The ruffle of black feathers, the molten slide of hot tar, the edge of the blade in his hands. Solidifying, Will unlocked the padlock and left it hanging on the clasp, pushing the door open to the shed.

Hannibal was a wreck. He slumped where he stood, not even straightening his spine when he noticed Will, weakness apparent in every inch of his body. His face was clammy and pale, eyes even more sunken than usual and hazy, unfocused. His hair was greasy, lips chapped to splitting, smelling of piss and fresh shit. Will felt both the twinge of amusement and the cold drop of his stomach, empathy if not sympathy for Hannibal's physical state. He could feel the discomforts as his own, the horrifying disconnect of dead hands, purple and cold. It was almost enough to make him shudder. Almost.

"Will," Hannibal greeted in a parched and husky voice, eyes hooded and blank.

Will didn't take his seat. He walked closer, flaying Hannibal with the scrutiny of his gaze and, when he was sure Hannibal was looking, flaring his nostrils in disgust. He passed Hannibal and walked to the winch, releasing another length of rope. Hannibal dropped to his knees immediately with a vocal groan, bound arms slapping against his thighs and his head tipped back in absolute relief.

"You stink," Will said.

It took Hannibal too long to respond. "Unavoidable. My apologies."

Will squatted in front of him, peering into his face and then down at his discolored hands. "Is there anything you need, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal licked his lips. His tongue was pale and barely left any saliva on his dry lips. "Please," he said, always polite. "May I have some water?"

Will smiled. "Yes, you may."

Relief and then weariness swept over his face in subtle ticks. Will pushed up and exited the shed, finding the hose around the side and cranking the water on to full pressure. When he returned, Hannibal gaped at him, then shut his jaw with a click, at once angered and resigned. "Matthew gave you water," Hannibal said, almost an accusation.

"Matthew cared about me," Will said. The rest was unsaid. He sprayed Hannibal in the chest and Hannibal flinched at the assault of cold water, gasping. Will directed the water at his face and Hannibal lifted his arms to protect himself, spluttering. Will allowed him that defense for now, and focused on getting him soaked, putting his thumb halfway on the nozzle to amp up the water pressure and stepping closer. Soon Hannibal's clothes were sodden and heavy and he shivered with the cold. The blood on the concrete began to wash away, with more blood and piss and shit. Besides protecting his face, Hannibal was enduring it. Will hadn't given him enough length on the rope for Hannibal to be a true threat, unable to get to the winch or

any weapon -- except for the chain that connected to Will's ankle cuffs. Will kept an eye on Hannibal's movements, curious if he would try to fight back.

Will circled him, forcing water over his head intermediately to keep his mouth and eyes busy, wincing and hiding from the onslaught. Will soaked his backside, making sure to clean him, tugging his pants down over his ass to spray away the shit, nothing like how he cleaned and groomed his dogs, no gentleness here. He tugged the pants roughly back when he was done and returned to Hannibal's front.

Will grabbed his hands and pinned them to his naval. A wave of repulsion rolled through him at the touch of those cold, unmoving fingers. He sprayed Hannibal in the face with his thumb off, reveling in the way he shuddered and scrunched up his face as water stung his skin and went up his nose, sputtering and coughing. Hannibal jerked his arms but Will held them steady. Hannibal was choking. So much for his composure. So much for his goddamn stoic face.

Will threw Hannibal's hands to the ground and stepped on the length of rope, pinning his arms down, and grabbed Hannibal by the hair, angling the hose upwards. Hannibal choked and coughed up water, chest heaving. His eyes were shut tight and nose pinched, flinching to each side and pulling against Will's grip on his hair. For a long moment Hannibal tried not to breathe, so Will put his thumb back over half of the nozzle and shot water up his nose. Hannibal gagged and his chest spasmed. It wasn't *enough*.

Frustrated, Will let go of his hair and gave him a moment of reprieve. Hunched over, Hannibal gasped for air as the water sprayed over his back. Will pulled his t-shirt over his head with one hand.

Will wrapped his shirt over Hannibal's nose and mouth, gripping it and the scruff at the back of Hannibal's head. For a moment Hannibal's eyes were pleading, round and wet, and though he didn't say Will's name, Will could hear the entreaty perched behind his teeth. *Will. Please.*

God, how he hated Hannibal then. Himself. Was there a difference? Had there ever been? His pursuit of Hannibal had in some ways been motivated by self-loathing, *you want a look at the circus freak, Doctor?* The loathing for Hannibal and himself in this moment was the same feeling.

Will aimed the hose at Hannibal's wrapped face and for a long moment the man didn't breathe, the white fabric growing heavy with water, pouring down Hannibal's neck and chest, eyes blinking away the droplets as he stared back at Will. Then, Hannibal's chest convulsed, and he tried to jerk away. Will held him firm. Hannibal tried to breathe, and then he was really drowning and struggling, the soaked fabric preventing him from breathing without taking water into his lungs. The shape of his mouth was revealed beneath the soaked fabric, gasping for air and coughing up water.

Will tilted the hose away.

The sound of Hannibal sucking for clear air, ragged and wet, was vivid. The sight of his gaping mouth outlined by the soaked fabric, on his hands and knees, vulnerable and bowed and only alive because Will decided it, sent a pulse of arousal down his spine.

Fuck.

Was this how Will had looked during his fevered epileptic episodes -- soaked in sweat, trembling and helpless? He hosed Hannibal's face again, watching his back curl and jerk as his lungs clutched for air, water burning, and then Hannibal was hyperventilating, unable to prevent the short bursts of air as he choked and sucked and choked again. His eyes rolled and unfocused, tears sliding down and disappearing in the spray of water. It was so animal, his body forced into a struggle for air, and Will's hand was white-knuckled on the hose, arousal building alongside bitter disgust. His own chest was tight, his breathing heavy. He felt the water go up his own nose and the scorching of his throat and lungs, the desperate clawing for air.

Fuck.

Will jerked the hose away and pulled away the fabric. Hannibal doubled over and heaved up water onto his the concrete, shaking and coughing. He was on his forearms, bent low, and for a moment Will thought he would fall to his side. The shirt hung heavy in his hands, soaking one pant leg as he tried to control his own breathing.

Will gave Hannibal a reprieve until the wracking coughs lessened, and then Hannibal looked up, the skin around his eyes swollen and his pupils blown wide and, oh, there was that feeling of dangerous power, of being whole. A fragile teacup broken and stitched back together with tar. Hannibal's gaze dropped to the erection thickening between Will's legs, obvious beneath the sweatpants. His eyes flicked back up, curious, and how Will wanted to push Hannibal on his back and hook his hands in his jaw and fuck his mouth; how he wanted to choke and take and break. And he could. And he *could* .

He could fuck Hannibal dry until his cock was bloody and -- oh god, he was spinning, his skin was on fire, he could count every drop of water on Hannibal's face, feel their tracing paths like the branching of his own veins; he could feel their hearts pumping blood to the same rhythm, could taste Hannibal's blood on his tongue.

Will let out an anguished noise. He pulled Hannibal up by the hair and sprayed his face again, thumb over the jet, water battering his skin; and then Will was pinching Hannibal's cheeks hard to force his mouth open and hold the hose inside, drowning him from the inside; and Hannibal was vomiting and swallowing water in waves; and Will was sobbing, heaving in tandem as if they shared a body, like Will was the fire and Hannibal the shadows on the wall and both of them one. He couldn't stop thinking of snatching the knife from his hip and -- then? Would he stab Hannibal's thigh or his own? Will's knees hit the floor and it was Abigail's blood soaking his pants. "I was drowning," Will said from somewhere distant, "And you held me under."

Hannibal's eyes rolled, and the spasms stopped. Water sprayed into his mouth and lungs and stomach and overflowed out in a graceful, continuous stream. It was just a moment, suspended in the halls of Will's mind, a moment where Hannibal's body stopped struggling.

Will threw the hose aside. Hannibal fell against him and -- he wasn't breathing.

Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal's chest, under his arms, and made a fist on the middle of his back. He pulled harsh compressions, two, three, and then Hannibal was heaving up water over his shoulder. He coughed, working the water out of his lungs and whole body shaking from the cold and the shock.

Will held him. He didn't let go. Will had solidified again in the act of cradling Hannibal's life and death in his hands. Hannibal's ragged breathing moved through his own body. His own clothes soaked slowly as Hannibal sagged against him and the water from the hose pooled around their legs. He was still faintly aroused by the water torture. Will pushed Hannibal away just enough to see his face. He was barely conscious, but there, the bright light of his intellect appraising Will behind amber eyes. Will took his skull in both hands, and screamed into his mouth.

It was an aching, anguished howl, Hannibal's face blurring behind the spring of tears. Will sucked in a breath only to scream again until both of their teeth shook with it. He wanted to pour every last toxic ounce into Hannibal's mouth, and he drank it like communion, water now black as ink seeping from his mouth.

"Why didn't you just kill me," Will said in a broken voice. "I can't bear this."

“I can no more kill you than you can kill me,” Hannibal said hoarsely.

Will sobbed and sagged, hands sliding down to Hannibal’s shoulders and fisting in the wet fabric. “I can't, I can't,” he heard himself whine. “I hate you. I hate you so goddamn much.”

Hannibal coughed up more water, heaving weakly. “Do you feel my pain as your own?” Hannibal asked.

"I don't want to." Will looked at what he had done to Hannibal. There was blood on his chin, either from the hose clacking against his gums or from something tearing inside. It was incredible that Hannibal was still conscious. And Will was capable of so much more.

Will drew the knife from his hip. His own hands looked necrotic, blackened and not his own. Will reached behind him and and snapped the ankle cuff around Hannibal’s leg. He pulled Hannibal's hands into his lap and cut through the knot, unwrapping the rope from his arms. The soaked rope pulled away from flesh with a soft sound, revealing bruised indentations, and Hannibal grunted in pain. Will stared at Hannibal’s frozen hands and could feel the blood slowly moving through veins, sluggish nerves coming alive. Will stroked Hannibal’s palms down to his wrists, eliciting another choked noise. He bent Hannibal’s fingers open, feeling how cold and stiff they were. The skin darkened and then went pale under the press of his fingertips.

“It is a comfort to the wretched to have companions in misery,” Hannibal said softly as Will palpitated and made blood to flow in his hands, the act both causing pain and healing. Hannibal was shaking from cold and shock, but when Will looked up his eyes were calm.

“How does it feel to share in my misery?” Will asked, plainly tired and at his wits end.

“Enlightening,” Hannibal breathed. “You struggle in delivering your punishment more than I do in bearing it.”

“There are limits to what you will gladly endure,” Will said, smoothing both hands down Hannibal’s palms and forearms. “With a beatific smile.”

“I imagine our boundaries are the same.”

“Are they?” Will’s voice shook with desperation. He couldn’t keep looking at Hannibal and stared down at their hands instead. He should cut off Hannibal’s hands. “If that’s the case,” Will struggled to say, “then I want to fined them and tear them down.”

“Boundaries keep us safe,” Hannibal said, repeating himself from another life. “You’ve never been good at maintaining boundaries between yourself and others. Would you have us dissolve into a great sea of limitless possibility?”

Will sat back and pushed himself away from Hannibal, scrubbing his face hard with one hand. He couldn’t seem to clear his eyes no matter how he rubbed at them, touching his face with palm and heel of hand as if keeping his skin in place. “I can’t, I can’t,” he pleaded.

“What can’t you do, Will?”

“God, you’re --” Will sobbed, once, then grit his teeth. “Just taking it. Letting me.”

“What can’t you do?” Hannibal repeated.

The pressure in his chest boiled over. “I can’t take your hands!” Will shouted.

For a moment there was only the sound of running water swirling down the drain, and Will’s gasping breaths. Hannibal was stunned and his face was blank. He looked down at his numb hands, considering, then examined Will again.

“I can’t do it,” Will said again into his hands.

“A punishment that mirrors the sin of the sinner,” Hannibal said at last. “I have taken limbs before. Without my hands, I would be greatly impaired; but not fully, I think.”

Will couldn’t think about this. The image of Hannibal with both hands severed burned vivid in his mind’s eye, and the sense of loss was staggering. Absurd, revolting that he could feel this kind of compassion for Hannibal. But everything was ugly now, the last wisps of tenderness and light in the world shriveled up, and the only beauty left was in those hands -- killing, cooking, drawing, conducting grace into the world and with it meaning. Aesthetics as ethics. Beauty imparting significance against the chaotic swarm of life. God, Will could remember what those hands felt like on his own skin.

“It would not be a cruelty I would willingly endure,” Hannibal continued. “Which makes it an apt punishment for your retribution. Why not, Will? You won’t take my life, that much is apparent. Why can’t you take my hands?”

Will didn’t answer. He slowly pushed himself to his feet, and went over to the far end of the shed. He bypassed the handsaws and found a pack of bottled water and took two out, returning to Hannibal and placing both on the ground near him. Hannibal’s eyes followed him, but he couldn’t meet them. Will gathered up the hose and took it outside, turning off the water. He stood there, staring at his hands.

Will shouldn’t have gone back into the shed. He should have taken the car and ran. Just got out, as far as he could go. He almost did. But as he stood by the shed door to lock Hannibal back in, he saw him struggling to hold the water bottle, unable to open it with hands that didn’t yet respond fully to his commands. It was the most pathetic he had ever seen him.

Will tried to strangle the sympathy. He tried.

Hannibal held the bottle between his wrists and twisted the cap off with his teeth, spitting it out where it rolled on the wet concrete. He sipped slowly from the water, eyes closed and relieved.

Chapter End Notes

content warning: humiliation, piss, starvation and dehydration, water torture, mild suicidal ideation, thoughts of mutilation and rape, A N G S T

Broken Teacup

Chapter Summary

“Objectively, I should kill you.”

“For the greater good?” Hannibal asked, delighted.

“To save my own damn self,” Will snapped. “You're never going to stop fucking with my life.”

“Ah, but Will -- who will fuck with your life when I'm gone?”

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Will gets drunk.

Chapter Notes

how long is this fic going to be EMO and not SMUTTY god, worm! not long, dear readers. say hi on tumblr + cw's at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thankfully, blessedly, there was a small bar of liquor stocked in the house, either by Matthew or, more likely, by the previous tenants. Will couldn't think of anything more embarrassing than leaving his captive to go buy liquor because he can't handle this situation sober, which he can’t. He didn't know what he was going to do with Hannibal: mutilate him, kill him, leave him to die, or try to arrest him (the last option both the most absurd and exactly what he should have done as soon as he had the chance). He went looking for the answers at the bottom of the bottle, and when he didn't find them there, he doesn't hesitate before opening the next.

Being drunk didn't exactly help. He was self-destructing, chasing unconsciousness or a state of mind where he didn't feel the press of ropes in his forearm and the dead flesh of his hands, where he couldn't count every blade of grass and feel the wind brush every hair on his skin. As he drank, the feeling of solidity and broken madness bled into each other, no longer on each side of a sharp edge but a gradient. There was room to feel between them instead of flipping a switch and, mercifully, room to hide.

Will staggered between rooms. He tried fruitlessly to get into Matthew's wifi hotspot, using every hawk breed he could think of for a password. He watched the sky change as he tongue grew numb in his mouth, trying not to think.

He didn't think. He remembered.

When Will returned to the shed, Hannibal was laying on the mattress on his back clad only in his briefs, hands intertwined over his stomach. His shoes, socks and clothes were all laid out neatly to dry, and the blanket was folded under his head. The second bottle of water was unopened. *Rationing it, in case I don't give him more.* He looked utterly unbothered, eyes snapping open only when Will finished stepping inside. They rested on Will and the bottle in his hand, a minute pursing of his lips showing his displeasure at Will's drunken state. Besides that he was infuriatingly relaxed.

"Hello, Will," he said, eyes slipping closed again. "Have you borrowed enough courage to make a decision?"

Will pulled out the folding chair and sat down, bottle between his legs. "I'm not sure that decisions happen," he said. *Oh god, I'm so drunk.* He struggled for the words to explain what he meant, chewing on his numb lip. "So much as are arrived at."

"How very passive of you," Hannibal replied in a clipped voice.

Will frowned. "You're mad that I'm drunk but not that I waterboarded you?"

"Couldn't bear to be alone?" Hannibal teased, eyes still softly shut. "Or do you hope I'll kill you in your vulnerable state?"

Why *did* he come here? Will smoothed his thumb repeatedly against the neck of the bottle, grounding himself in the sensation of smooth glass. "You can't eat me if I'm full of poison," he said with a shrug, and took another sip.

Hannibal finally opening his eyes, just staring at the ceiling for a moment before latching onto Will. He was glad, then, for the numb buffer of the drink, because those eyes could see into the back of his skull. "Suicide is the enemy, Will," Hannibal said, and there was no more trace of mocking humor in his voice.

"I'm as suicidal as I've ever been," Will said. "An abstract thought floating in my periphery. Something that can only be glanced at."

Hannibal's eyes burned. "There are many ways out of this purgatory. Paths for you to chart."

“This isn’t purgatory,” Will said, his mouth heavy. “This is hell.”

“Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place, for where we are is hell, and where hell is we must ever be,” Hannibal recited. “You are the source of divine judgement, Will, not one of the damned writhing in the pits.”

“You can't just ascribe me agency like this isn't all your fault.”

“Why not?” Hannibal asked, amused. “If I took your agency, its mine to give back.”

Will swallowed. A pulse of blood pricked the nerves under his skin. Hannibal untangled his fingers from where they were folded on his stomach, his hands still slightly discolored and very stiff. He sat up on the mattress neatly, crossing his bare legs.

“I haven't come here for therapy,” Will sneered.

“Haven't you? I've proven myself to be uniquely capable as a conversation partner.”

Will couldn't look away from the bruised rope marks on his arms. “I should kill you,” he said in a hushed voice.

Hannibal gave a little sigh of annoyance. “You know what your problem is, Will? You spend too much time occupied with ‘shoulds’.”

“That's my problem?” Will tried to sound angry but it just came out incredulous. “Not that my ex is a cannibalistic serial killer who framed me for his crimes and --” He gestured vaguely, not wanting to list every god damn sin.

“Who’s ‘should’?” Hannibal continued. “Who’s judgement clouds your own?”

“Objectively, I should kill you.”

“For the greater good?” Hannibal asked, delighted.

“To save my own damn self,” Will snapped. “You're never going to stop fucking with my life.”

“Ah, but Will -- who will fuck with your life when I'm gone?”

Will stared. Only Hannibal could be so amused in this situation. He cursed under his breath and took another swig from the bottle of vodka. He could barely feel it stinging his lips. “I *want* to kill you.”

“No, Will,” Hannibal said gently. “You want to *kill* . And there is no one in this world who understands that facet of yourself as well as I do. No one who accepts you and your darkest brilliance, but me.”

His words burned Will to the bone. He shuddered and clenched his jaw, feeling like an exposed nerve, all numbness granted by the alcohol suddenly vanishing. He could feel every

tooth in his skull. “You're capable of so much more,” Hannibal continued. “You’ve no idea. How the damned will bend beneath your gaze.”

“I'm not a killer. Not like you.”

“We are made of the same components,” Hannibal said, his words laden with poetic truth. “Stardust and breath and cellular mitosis.”

Will leaned over his legs and put his head in his hand, the other gripping the bottle tightly. “I'm too drunk for this kind of conversation.”

Hannibal pursed his lips, and switched tracks. “If you're not going to kill me, then you might as well give me something to eat.”

“Don't think anything here is up to your standards.” Will ran his hand through his hair. “Feeding you is too close to keeping you here.”

“If you’re not going to kill me,” Hannibal said again, “and you’re not going to keep me captive, then you will let me go.”

“I can’t just let you walk out of here.” Will took a deep breath, trying to calm his nerves, and looked back at Hannibal. “You’re the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Hannibal gave a small nod of his head. “I’m much more than that.”

“I can’t let you go free.”

Something sharp glinted in Hannibal’s eyes, just for a moment. “Turning me in would be turning yourself in as well. You have no evidence against me. That path will lead us right back to where we started: you in your little cell, a canary no one can hear in the mines.”

“You see my problem then. I can’t do anything I want to, or should do. My hands are tied.”

Hannibal shook his head with a fond smile. “You hold the lead, Will. All you need do is untangle it.”

Will looked away, towards the drain, vexation deepening the crease in his brow. The concrete was still stained dark from the blood. Of course Hannibal could see the jagged landscape of his mind, filling the shed like a barbed trap. The lines between them weren't severed, and Hannibal wasn't his puppeteer. They could see each other, and in seeing be seen, in their mutual gaze *become* . With a shudder Will remembered how good it had felt to open his eyes like that, and that feeling was still there if the pieces lined up, if the wire smoothed out.

“You've got an idea of who I am in your head,” Will said. “Not sure our images line up.”

“Do you know what an imago is?” Hannibal asked. “It's a flying insect. The last stage of transformation.”

“Oh, great.”

Hannibal ignored that. “It's also a term from the dead religion of psychoanalysis. An imago is an image of a loved one, buried in the unconscious, carried with us all our lives.”

Will tasted something rotten at the word ‘love’. “An ideal.”

“The concept of an ideal,” Hannibal clarified. “I have a concept of you, just as you have a concept of me.”

“Neither of us is very ideal.”

“What a tragedy, when the imago mars the truth.” Hannibal’s eyes darkly gleamed. “What wonder, when the beloved can be beheld.”

“In the eye of the beholder.” Will’s head swam. He was finding it difficult to latch into the conversation even as it swept him away, drawing him deeper into their mutual reality. Water swirling around a drain. Down, down the rabbit hole. Will frowned. “My conscious actions can't be untangled from the images we have of each other.”

“Image,” Hannibal corrected, and Will’s heart fluttered. One image. Lining the pieces up. “On some level, your actions are not real until they are witnessed by me. It was not possible for you to kill Matthew before I arrived.”

“Ok, now *you* sound drunk,” Will said dismissively, but his heart was pounding. *I didn't kill him when I should have. I didn't want to kill him in self defense.*

“Much of your distress is born from the schism between your visions and reality,” Hannibal said, voice low and dry and reverent. “How easy you would move through the world, were they the same.”

Will thought again of taking Hannibal’s hands. Really thought of it. He would keep them, he realized, and keep Hannibal alive; and it would be so difficult to leave the severed hands anywhere, as if, unguarded, they might continue the violence and terrible beauty they exuded in life. Hannibal would not be able to touch him again. Not with his hands. Will imagined stumps wrapped around him, a stiff prosthetic hand at the small of his back, Hannibal moving behind Will in the kitchen and directing him, sitting at the harpsichord with scarred stumps hovering above the keys as he played in his mind. Will’s chest was too tight, the sense of mourning like a puncture deep inside and the slow irrevocable loss of himself through that hole. Will ached.

“Fuck,” Will cursed under his breath, drawing a hand across his brow. The room was swaying. He set the bottle down and his movements seemed slightly sped up.

He wasn't free. There were only so many ways he could move without rubbing against a sharp, lethal part of himself. Will got up from the chair on wobbly legs and staggered in front of Hannibal. The Chesapeake Ripper looked up at him, still and relaxed with his bruised hands held softly in his lap. Expectant. Curious. His broad chest rose and fell evenly, lungs expanding beneath ribs and skin. Hyperaware, Will saw every detail: the greasy strands of unwashed hair, the puncture mark in his neck from Matthew’s dart, the patches of silver in his furred chest.

Will kneeled in front of him. He placed a hand on the back of his head and snared his fingers in hair. Hannibal was immobile and unyielding as Will pulled on his hair, the predator waiting crouched behind his eyes. Will's grip tightened and Hannibal finally relaxed into the commanding touch, chin tilting up and neck elongating. Will pressed his lips to Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal was stiff and unresponsive. Both of their eyes were open. Hannibal's lips were dry and cool. Will sighed and held Hannibal in place, tilting his own head to better slot his mouth over Hannibal's. This was his design: Hannibal would take the knife from the sheath at Will's hip and then the shed would fill with chaos and blood. Escalation. A fight for his life. No calculated control, no premeditation. If he couldn't kill Hannibal then he would take away what he wanted.

Hannibal placed his hands on Will's collar and nudged, but Will stayed where he was, pressing their lips together again and again until both were wet and warm. He gently sucked at the top lip in a bid for a response. Hannibal pushed him harder and Will disengaged with a huff of annoyance. "What are you doing, beloved?" Hannibal asked, the surface amusement edged with a bitter flavor.

"What does it look like?" Will was surprised by the desire in his voice, twisting Hannibal's hair tighter when he kept his hands firmly separating them. He leaned forward anyway, words brushing Hannibal's skin. "Weren't we just talking about taking what I want?"

Hannibal turned his face away as Will dragged one of his hands down and pinned it to the mattress. "You're drunk," Hannibal stated.

Will laughed. "What? Was putting your cock in me just part of the charade, doctor?" he sneered, teeth grazing his jaw.

"Is sex what you want?" Hannibal asked mildly. Will had leverage on him, slowly pushing him back even as Hannibal's hand snaked up to his neck.

Will leaned his weight on Hannibal's pinned hand and saw a twitch of pain pass over his face. His eyes dilated in tandem with a deep throb of arousal, and Will let out a shuddering moan as he claimed Hannibal's mouth again. Stiff lips yielded finally as Hannibal allowed the kiss. He parted his lips and Will licked inside, noting how the taste had changed from Hannibal's captivity, more acidic beneath the overwhelming flavor of alcohol. Kissing him was still so familiar, even though it was from another life. Hannibal's thumb stroked the notch at the base of Will's neck, a scratch of his nail in warning.

Hannibal was calculating.

Will pushed him back on the mattress, straddling Hannibal. He was soft when Will pushed his ass back. "God, if you don't want it say *no* ," Will mumbled against his lips.

Hannibal's jaw clicked shut. Displeasure rolled off him, but when Will pulled back to look his face was blank and passive. "What is wrong with you?" Will spat in sudden anger. "You'd let me do anything to you just to sate your damn curiosity!"

Before he had even processed what he was doing, the knife was in Will's hands. Hannibal's hand slipped higher onto his neck but didn't squeeze, and Will got the blade of the knife under Hannibal's chin.

"Will," Hannibal said sharply, still relaxed and pliant beneath him. "You are only hurting yourself. Sober up."

Will's hand shook on the handle of the blade, and a bead of red bloomed on Hannibal's neck. "I'm going to fuck you," Will heard himself say. "Then I'm going to saw off your hands and blow my brains out."

Hannibal's hand slipped around the back of Will's neck and he was suddenly very dizzy. Stars clouded his vision and his limbs grew weak, the pressure to the side of his neck draining him fully of his strength. His eyes rolled to the back of his head.

Nauseous, vision clouded by spots of light, Will wasn't sure if he actually fainted but when his vision cleared he was on his side on the mattress, and he was roaring drunk. His vision kept listing to one side, curtains drawing as he struggled to keep his eyes open. He felt warm all over, numb and tingling and like he might vomit. Hannibal was sitting in the chair. Watching over him like a guard dog. A hellhound. Maybe Hannibal would kill him -- even in his drunken state, Will could tell that he was contemplating. Will closed his eyes and sunk into the comfort of giving up.

He started imagining how Hannibal would kill him, peeling the skin away from his chest like petals, feeling his heart beating in his hand. Sewing the lids of his eyes open. Taking the brain from his skull and putting mirrors in its place. No, more likely he would keep Will alive as long as possible and feed him pieces of himself, limbs and organs and blood pudding and his own brain, cut out piece by piece and fried before his eyes. Lovingly served.

But Hannibal didn't take the knife to Will's flesh. He just sat and observed while Will went in and out of spotty consciousness.

"Why don't you kill me?" Will asked with a heavy mouth. He looked a mess, unshaven and underfed and gaunt, eyes bright and glassy and bruised. The skin on one side of his face was mottled yellow with fading bruises.

Hannibal's eyes were dark and cold on him. Inhuman. Will wondered if that gaze was the last thing his victims saw before they died, or if it was reserved for him alone. He felt a spike of fear beneath the drunken dizziness.

"And remain trapped in my current predicament?" Hannibal's voice was utterly flat.

"Fair." Will rubbed his eyes with a groan. "Besides right now, when was the last time you wanted to kill me?"

"I don't want to kill you now, Will."

Will snorted. He pushed himself up to sitting, rubbing the back of his neck. "Please. You can't stand the idea that I would take my life from you."

Hannibal said nothing, turning his head glacially to stare into the distance. Flat apathy gave way to the concealed emotions beneath -- rage, rejection, and a biting sorrow.

“You went to great lengths to keep me alive when I put you at risk,” Will said. “You wanted me to see you.”

“Even as the risk of discovery grew, I had long put thoughts of killing you from my mind,” Hannibal said, not looking back. “It was clear to me from the beginning that you had tremendous potential. I wasn't wrong.” An edge to the final word. There was doubt there. Regret.

“Second thoughts, Hannibal?” Will said with a smirk, even as that regret became his own. Will tried to remind himself that Hannibal wasn't capable of feeling such emotions, but his empathy said otherwise.

Hannibal looked at him, eyes wide and for a moment filled with a too-human ache. With a shock, Will realized it was the first time he had called Hannibal by his first name since his hospitalization. “I still have tremendous faith in you, Will.”

The words burned his throat and behind his eyes. It was unfair that such a monster could speak so longingly. “You think I'm still going to come around?” Will said around the knot in his throat. “After everything you've done?”

“I've done everything for you,” Hannibal said vehemently. There were teeth to his words, a wet gleam in his eyes.

Will felt him. Hannibal was exposing a deep room in his mind palace, one of rotten floorboards and ice, and Hannibal felt, he really had emotions didn't he, he wasn't a psychopath at all -- and that was more horrifying. Hannibal was raw, and god was he upset that everything wasn't going to plan.

Will tasted tears in the back of his throat. He felt flayed. “You took Abigail away from me,” he said in a shaking voice.

For a moment, Hannibal said nothing. “I did.”

Will shuddered on his next breath, tears burning behind his eyes. “You made a promise to her. Do you even remember that? You promised her we’d go -- camping together.” He choked on the last word. It sounded absurd now.

“I remember. Would you still consider her family, after knowing that she hunted with her father?”

“Yes,” Will said after a moment, swallowing hard. “I was upset when I found out. She… the last time I saw her, she was so afraid of me.”

“Can you accept a killer, Will?” Hannibal asked. “Abigail? Yourself?”

“You?” That was what Hannibal wanted.

“What happened to Abigail had to happen,” Hannibal said. “There was not a space in the world for her.” He paused on a breath, and in that moment Will was sure one of them would cry.

“I want to give her back,” Hannibal said.

Will shuddered and a tear fell down his cheek.

“Occasionally, on purpose, I drop a teacup to shatter on the floor,” Hannibal said. “I'm not satisfied when it doesn't gather itself up again. Someday, perhaps, a cup will come together again.” His eyes were glassy. Will had never seen him more emotionally raw, the leak from the damn intense for how sturdy the barriers were that normally kept these feelings away. “I dropped you,” Hannibal said in a low voice. “To see the pieces forged again, stronger than before. I wanted to make the teacup come back together.”

Will wiped his eyes before another blasphemous tear could fall. “Looks like you just broke me.”

And then Hannibal said something and their reality changed, like Will had been dreaming and suddenly awoke, like everything reversed in the mirror.

“Abigail is alive, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

cw: suicidal ideation, Will still wants to chop off Hannibal's hands but doesn't.

Purgatory

Chapter Summary

So long as the door to the room stayed closed, whatever was happening in the outside world didn't affect him.

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Everything happens quickly after that.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is weird bc Will is so done and tired but plot happens all around him. if the plot feels rushed, well, that's because Will is extremely depressed and having an existential crisis ;)

The car peeled steadily down the highway as the dusk sucked the light from the end of the day. The handling was a bit sticky, the car not particularly well taken care of, but that at least was something to focus on, keeping the drive smooth along south 81. Asphalt bled into one mindless strip, the Pennsylvania flats becoming Maryland flats for just a moment before Virginia opened up like a palm. He kept the radio on just to fill the car with noise.

The backseat was filled with a few bags of food and just as much booze. Besides the clothes he was wearing, Will left all of Matthew’s belongings in the house, in addition to his body in the freezer and Hannibal in the shed.

Underneath the hard exterior of Hannibal’s countenance, his eyes had burned with longing, like a starved man muzzled before a feast. Will had dropped garden shears at his feet. They weren’t the right tool for the job, but with some time Hannibal would be able to snap the lock on his ankle. What he did then, Will didn’t care.

During the drive Will might have considered his actions, might have remembered his past life with a sick clutch of his stomach, but all was overshadowed by Abigail. She was alive. Will had fallen sideways into another universe, again. The secret knowledge shared by himself and Hannibal -- and Abigail -- had radically shifted Will’s perspective.

Relief wasn't the right word. What was the opposite of mourning? Because Will had mourned Abigail, quietly, without fanfare, only admitted to himself when he woke every morning and remembered that she was gone and he would never see her again, how completely he had failed her, how futile his every effort. Now the same unreality hit him with a lurch -- but that she was alive.
Hannibal had spared her.

He's toying with your lives, Will thought to himself. *He gets just as much thrill out of saving someone's life as ending it.*

It was dark by the time Will reached Wolf Trap. It was strange to come back to an empty house with no pack to greet him, though their smell lingered. Will didn't turn on the lights. He brought the food into the house and, after clenching his hands like trying to avoid scratching an itch, the bottles of booze. His back had hurt terribly for the entire drive. He changed into his own clothes and brought a bottle of whiskey out to the barn.

"I want to see her," Will had told Hannibal, shock and anxiety and alcohol warring in his body, tumultuous and burning.

"We can see her tonight," Hannibal had said, quiet urgency to his voice. *"With a bit of time I can clean the evidence here. What do you want to do with Matthew?"*

"Is she in Baltimore?" Will had asked.

Hannibal didn't reply. In that moment, Will knew that he wouldn't see Abigail without Hannibal.

Will built a fire in the pit behind the barn. He sat on a stump and sipped whiskey, watching the fire grow and feeling his own burn inside. Will threw Matthew's clothes on top of the fire and drank until they were ash.

He left the pit to burn through the night, stumbling back to his house which no longer sat like a beacon upon dark waters, but shadows upon shadows. Will felt his way through the dark and the dim moonlight, through raven feathers and black tar. He collapsed on his bed, kicking off his shoes lamely. The sheets smelled like moth balls, like dust.

"I'm leaving," Will had said, rough and choked with the threat of tears.

In the silence, Hannibal might have begged with his look *don't leave* or *how far do you plan to go? Dare you? Can you?*

But Will did. He left.

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Sunlight and scratching at the door woke Will into a bleary and biting hangover. He sat on the bed and rubbed his face, at first not understanding where he was. When clarity came that he was in his home in Wolf Trap, and the scratching and whining continued from the porch, Will pushed himself to his feet and made his way unsteadily to the front door.

Winston was on him as soon as Will had the door open. Will was so surprised he laughed, and the bright sound was foreign to his own ears. "Hey, buddy!" Will said, getting to his knees to dig his hands into Winston's fur and receive the dog's enthusiastic affection. "What are you doing here?"

Winston nuzzled up against Will's neck, and he found that he couldn't bear to let go of him. He wrapped his arms around Winston, scratching him just behind the ears with one hand. Tears burned behind Will's eyes. It was nice. Will hadn't had nice in months and months. He buried his face into Winston's fur and cried.

A few hours later, both of them had food in their bellies and were curled up on the bed, Will drinking his second cup of coffee and willing the hangover away. It was easier to get through the day with Winston at his side. When Will's thoughts clawed at his skull and he reached for the bottle, Winston whined at him. "Don't look at me like that," Will accused, but held off on the drink.

In the afternoon Will found himself with need for something to do, and since all his fishing lures were confiscated as evidence he went to the workshop to tackle a boat motor that had sat there since last year. It was easy to fall back into in the project and soon his mind was filled with the tangible, material problem of the engine. No humans, no violence, just metal, mechanics, and wires. Problems he could solve.

Hours later, Will was sweating in his undershirt with grime up to his elbows. Winston's head lifted from where he was curled up, ears swiveling, and a moment later Will heard the sound of a car coming up the drive. Winston trotted off towards the newcomer and Will reluctantly dragged his mind from his task. He couldn't think of anything he wanted to do less than see

someone. He wanted to be in his own little world here in Wolf Trap for just a bit longer, a reality that only belonged to him. After everything that had happened, there was still a bit of home left here.

Will wiped his forehead and hands on a towel as he heard a car door open and close, and Alana greeting Winston. “There you are, buddy,” she said sweetly.

Will walked out of the back workshop and around the house. Alana jerked in surprise when she saw him. “Will!” She straightened immediately and, for a moment, it seemed like she would run towards him, but she held herself back. He saw her go into crisis mode immediately, scanning the situation for danger. “You're -- you're here!”

Will walked towards her, eyes on Winston. “I'm here,” he repeated lamely.

“Are you alright?” Alana asked. “What on earth happened? We've been looking for you.”

Will knelt down and petted Winston, who was a bit concerned by Alana’s tone of voice. “I'm okay now,” he said. Well, he was better.

“How long have you been here?” Alana asked.
Will sighed. He knew he needed a story, but it was difficult to care. “I got here last night.” He straightened, and gestured to the house. “Do you want coffee?”

“Sure,” Alana said after a pause. She followed him inside, and waited until they were both sitting with fresh cups of coffee at the little table before pushing the conversation. “You've been missing for a week, Will.”

“Has it only been a week?” Will rubbed his jaw, where his beard had grown in more than he usually let it.

“You know I need to call Jack,” Alana said carefully.

Will sighed. “Yeah, I know.” Then he would be processed, interviewed, and sent back to the BSHCI. Unless you kill Alana, he thought, and shook his head at himself. “Can you wait, just a bit?” He asked instead. “I’d like a little more time… with Winston.”

Alana looked at him sadly. “I wish I could stop the world for you, Will,” she said. “But it's

not that simple. There is another case now, and…" Her expression shifted. "Do you know where Hannibal is?"

Will flinched, and turned it into a look of surprise. "What do you mean?"

"We haven't been able to get in touch with him since Saturday," Alana said, although Will had no idea what day it was today. "And he missed his appointments yesterday. We think he might be missing, too."

Will found it easy to lie and look meekly up through his curls. "No, I don't know where he is."

"Were you with Matthew?"

"I really don't want to talk about it." Will stared into his coffee cup. "It's not like anyone will believe me."

"You can tell me what happened."

"You still think I'm delusional."

Alana gave him a sad smile. "Delusions are specific systems of belief. A distorted lens. You know what happened to you, and I will believe what you tell me."

Will stared out the window, where the sunlight was dusty and the sky was blue. This might be the last time he saw this little patch of the world -- the grassy fields of abandoned farmland stretching to the trees. His hand found Winston's fur again. If they locked him up again -- no; if Hannibal let them keep Will locked up again, he would never have this. "I've finally come to terms with my delusion," Will said, a bitter part of him enjoying the ambiguity of the statement. "It's lonely, living in a reality that no one else shares. I no longer know if a light from yours could reach mine, not even in a thousand years." He smiled sadly. "I wish I could go back, to that previous world."

"I'm not sure I understand," Alana said gently.

"I hope, for your sake, that you don't. Stay on the other side of the glass, Alana. Don't look too closely."

• • • • • • • • • •

Alana called Jack. She stayed with Will and Winston until the FBI came. He was photographed in his own home before being taken into a car for full processing and interview at the Bureau Headquarters. Will easily told Jack a story of how he had successfully escaped Matthew the night of his attempt and made his way back to Wolf Trap undetected. The story fell from his lips fully formed as if dropping from a great height. Will was not concerned about lying to the FBI, or the evidence left in the cabin, or whatever Hannibal was doing now. He no longer felt bound by law and order.

At the FBI Jack made Will retell his story while he was being processed. By the second time he asked Will why he never considered calling for help after his escape, Will realized that it was an unconventional interrogation technique meant to disarm him. Jack treated him neither as a suspect nor a victim, but as a member of his team he was trying to help out. The tension in the room was palpable. Will wished that it his former colleagues were not the ones processing him. He supposed that they had, before, but Will had mostly been unconscious for that.

Now Will had to endure the hiss of shock when Price removed the bandages from his back, his clipped joke not quite diffusing the tension. “I'm not a living-people doctor, but this definitely looks infected,” he said. “I'm going to take a wound culture, but we should call in the doctor.” The wounds on his back were still inflamed and aching. Price popped a thermometer in Will’s mouth. “99, nothing compared to the fever before.”

“I'm fine,” Will mumbled.

Price made a noise of disagreement but said nothing. Jack came around to take a look at his back while Beverly snapped pictures.

“A car radio antenna,” Will said.

“Matthew did this to you?” Jack clarified.

“Yup,” Will said without feeling.

Beverly cleared her throat. “Boys, would you mind?” Whatever she communicated in her look sent Price, Zeller and Jack out of the lab.

“You probably shouldn't be alone with a suspected serial killer,” Will said. His hands were cuffed together but it wouldn't be too difficult to use the short chain to choke her out.

Beverly glowered at him. “I’ll take my chances. Are you going to hurt me?”

“Nope.”

“Alright.” She leaned against the counter. “I know someone really good in the sexual crimes unit. She’s done about two decades of sexual assault response. Should I call her?”

Will shook his head. The caring behind the offer made his eyes sting. “No. You're not going to find anything like that.”

Beverly let out a breath she had been holding. “You're sure?”

“Yeah.” Will couldn't summon the words to thank her.

The doctor evaluated his back in the interview room, and came back a few hours later with medication. Jack came in again to go over the finer points of Will’s story -- and there were grey areas, like how Will managed to get from Pennsylvania to Wolf Trap with no money. Finally it seemed like Jack was done with him, but still Will was left in the room. An agent brought him something to drink and eat, and by the sixth hour Will was wondering if they expected him to sleep in the interrogation room, or were really depriving him of sleep to try to find the lies in his statement.

So long as the door to the room stayed closed, whatever was happening in the outside world didn't affect him.

Will wondered how Abigail was. He wondered how Hannibal had treated her, whether he was imprisoning her or had manipulated her into staying hidden by her own volition. Will had no doubt that they ate together, which probably meant that Hannibal was feeding her human flesh. Just like her father had. Did she know? She must. Even if she didn't recognize the taste, Hannibal had no need to hide exactly what manner of game he served. Did Abigail eat willingly?

And if she was able to recognize the taste of human meat -- Will suddenly remembered a

dinner the three of them shared and a look of concealed shock on her face, a sudden change of pallor as blood waxed and waned beneath her skin. If she had realized, then what did that make her?

Will couldn't summon the disgust he knew he should feel. Hannibal had fed them people he had killed. But Will had lost all reference points to understand cannibalism as more than putting food in one's mouth. There was no meaning, only flesh.

When Jack finally came back inside the interview room, Will asked, "Is it time to take me back to Dr. Chilton?"

Jack gave him a hard look. "Not quite." There was a folder in his hands. He took a seat opposite Will and folded his hands atop the folder. So much for the informal interview process, Will thought. Jack was treating him like a suspect again.

"Have you told us everything that happened at the shed?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Will lied.

"And when you escaped, you fought Matthew. Can you describe his injuries?"

"I sprayed his eyes with bleach. They were swollen. Contusion to the head from where I smashed it against the bathroom mirror."

"That's it?"

"That's it."

Jack took a deep breath. "When you left, you said Matthew was alive."

"He was unconscious," Will said, and then shrugged. "It was a head injury. Maybe he was dying, I didn't stick around to find out the extent of the damage."

Jack gave him another long look. Then he unfolded his hands, opened the folder, and slid a photograph across the table. It was a picture of the freezer in Matthew's shed, the lid open, but at first Will couldn't make sense of the contents. There was a lot of frost obscuring what was inside. Then Will saw the tableau, and his eyes went wide.

Matthew’s body was arranged in a fetal position on his side with his torso twisted upright. His chest cavity had been carved open, the ribs broken and arranged outward like the teeth of a venus fly trap. The freezer around him was filled to the brim with flowers and weeds, and everything had been sprayed with water so there was an even coat of white ice and frost. Tucked inside the chest cavity were Matthew’s severed hands, holding his heart out like an offering. The organ was finely dusted with frost.

The message rang clear in his mind, like Hannibal was there to whisper in his ear.
Jack arranged more pictures in front of Will. Will inspected each -- the graceful, surgical cuts through skin; the arteries tied around the severed hands like a wreath; Matthews's face obscured by a bouquet of small flowers, no doubt picked from the surrounding woodland.
“Did he take anything?” Will asked, his mouth dry.

“The eyes and the lungs,” Jack said.
Hannibal wasn't able to take anything for food, since Matthew had spoiled for at least half a day in the summer heat before Will had put him in the freezer. Taking the lungs was practical, to make room for the arrangement in the chest. Taking the eyes was both a jab at Matthew and… something else.

“This is the Ripper,” Will said, looking at Jack.

The vein in Jack’s face told Will he thought the same. “The Ripper has been dormant for nearly three years.”

“As the Ripper, sure,” Will said. “He doesn't display all his kills, Jack. And he has been busy with other projects.”

“Such as?”

“The Ripper is the Copycat,” Will said.

Jack narrowed his eyes. “You still think you know who the Copycat is?”

“Look,” Will said irritably. “We can dance around this all night. The fact is that the surgical skill required to do this --” He tapped the photograph. “--Is the Ripper’s signature. He wove arteries together, Jack, he’s showing off.” It was even more impressive knowing that Hannibal’s hands were damaged. That alone must have taken hours. “I don’t know how to do that.”

“So you’re telling me you don’t know how Matthew ended up here?”

“I can see how he ended up there,” Will said. “But I didn’t do it.”

“You’re not telling me everything,” Jack accused.

“Well, god Jack --” Will snapped angrily. “Can you blame me? I already told you the truth and you didn’t believe me!”

“There wasn’t any evidence!” Jack shouted back.

“He doesn’t leave any evidence! You’re not going to catch him, Jack. Not the usual way.”

Jack glowered. “How did the Ripper know where to find you and Matthew? And why did he kill Matthew?”

Will leaned back in his chair and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Matthew became obsessed with me because of the Copycat kills. He’s the one who killed the bailiff, he told me himself. The real Copycat was settling the score. Showing Matthew who he really is. I don’t know how they got in touch.”

“If he is who you’re saying he is,” Jack said cautiously. “Then what is this supposed to mean?”

Will glanced down at the frozen bouquet of flowers, flesh, and bone. “Isn’t it obvious, Jack? It’s a love letter.”

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They kept Will in the interview room overnight, and he napped fitfully in his chair. Will’s lawyer came to try and terminate the holding, but in the end Jack kept Will there for the full 48 hours. Whenever he would fall asleep an agent would come in to recite the same questions, which Will ignored. He was exhausted and sore, but at least his infection was responding to the medication.

Alana came in, towards the end of the 48 hours. She had a different file in her hand.

“Who is that?” Will asked.

His callousness made her frown. “Miriam Lass,” she said, and then showed him the photographs.

A severed arm was hung alongside half a dozen fishing lures, a phone cradled in the hand. Another photograph revealed that the fishing lines were sewn into the veins at the stump of the arm, everything hanging at different heights from a chain link fence. The name Miriam Lass sounded familiar. “Where is this?” Will asked.

“Quantico’s outdoor shooting range,” Alana said. “What do you know about Miriam Lass?”

It took just a moment for Will to remember. “She’s considered one of the Ripper’s victims from his last sounder, but her body was never found. She was an agent in the BAU.”

“A student Jack recruited,” Alana clarified.

“And that’s her arm? I thought they never found anything of her.”

“It’s her arm,” Alana said. “But it was found today.”

Will took a closer look at the photographs. “He was keeping her alive. For years.” He paused. “She’s still alive.”

“How do you know?”

“He would have left the whole body,” Will reasoned.

“The lures are similar to the ones we found in your home,” Alana said. “One for each of the Copycat’s victims, complete with new forensic evidence.”

Will counted the lures. There was one for Abigail. *We have to maintain the lie that she’s dead*. Actually, there was one more lure than Will expected.

“The Ripper has taken credit for the Copycat kills,” Alana said. “You’re going to be exonerated.”

“The Copycat had six victims. There are seven lures.”

“One of them contains veining from Matthew Brown.”

Will smirked. “Everything's wrapped up in a neat little bow.”

“You don't sound relieved.”

Will gave her a long look. “You don't share in my delusion. You're still outside of it.”

“You have to know,” Alana said with a note of desperation, “We wanted to believe that you were innocent. Despite what the evidence said.”

“But you didn't,” Will said quickly. “You still don't.”

“I've known Hannibal for nearly a decade. I don't want to believe that he did this either.”

“Is Hannibal still missing?” Will asked.

“Yes,” Alana said cautiously.

“No alibi.”

“I think you’re wrong about him.”

Will sighed. “Think what you want, Alana. If I'm exonerated, I'm going home.”

• • • • • • • • • •

Will went home and drank and slept. Hannibal didn't come in the night. Alana came around the next day to bring him his pack. He was a free man again. Jack called and told Will they had found Miriam Lass alive in the Ripper's workshop, but that they hadn't found the Ripper.

Will went to see Miriam Lass. Jack no doubt thought Will was there to help catch the Ripper. But Will had to see her himself, to see if she was like him. They had both had the Ripper in their minds.

"I don't remember him," Miriam said from across the table.

"You will," Will said. "I didn't remember at first. He used lights to induce seizures and lost time." But if Hannibal had left her alive, he was either confident that she wouldn't identify him, or he was prepared to leave this life behind.

"He's been in both our heads," Miriam said. She scratched her prosthetic arm, and Will couldn't look away from it. "Now I have something to itch. But I can't itch the empty spots in my mind." Angry tears threatened to spill from her eyes. "He took years from my life."

She was deeply traumatized, but still fighting to try and make herself useful to the investigation. Will could feel the sting of hyper awareness across his skin. He should be trying to catch Hannibal as well, but Will did not see a reflection of himself sitting across the table. "He kept you alive for a reason. You impressed him, so he spared you."

"This doesn't feel like being spared," she spat.

No. No it doesn't.

"He said he was saving me for last," Miriam added. "He's not done with me yet."

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Hannibal didn't come the second night. But he did call.

"Hello, Will."

“Hello, Doctor Lecter. You've been busy.”

“I have. Congratulations on your exoneration.”

“I hope you're not expecting thanks for that.”

“That won't be necessary. How does it feel to be a free man?”

“There's a certain amount of existential dread.”

“You've been untethered.”

“Partially. How long are you going to remain missing? Or will you simply disappear, like smoke in the night?”

“We could simply leave,” Hannibal replied. “I have some business left, but it is not strictly necessary to tie up all loose ends. We could leave this life behind. Pack a bag, bid your dogs farewell, leave no note and disappear. Almost polite.”

“Where would we go?” Will asked.

“Camping,” Hannibal replied.

Will laughed, despite himself. “Just like that?”

“Just so. I always keep my promises, Will.”

Will was quiet for a long time, watching his dogs curled up by the empty fireplace. He thought of Matthew’s body, frozen into a bittersweet bouquet. Will wasn't able to take Hannibal’s hands or bring him to justice -- not his own sense of justice, and not Jack’s. Will knew that he could work with Jack to try to find evidence that would capture Hannibal, and he could even use Hannibal’s desire for him to get closer. But ultimately, Will didn't want Hannibal to be caught.

“I want to see her,” Will said.

“Can you drive?” Hannibal asked.

“They gave me back my car. But uh. I'm not good to drive.”

“I’ll give you an address. You can drive there in the morning, and I will take you the rest of the way.”

“You don't trust me.”

“I’d like to.”

Will emptied his glass. “I saw Miriam Lass today.”

“Hmm. How is Miriam?”

“Traumatized. But she’ll live. She doesn't remember you yet.”

“How did it feel to see her?”

Will ran his finger along the lip of the glass.

“I'm operating with a profound sense of unreality. I didn't feel anything.”

“You've found a way to turn off your empathy.”

“No, no. That's not it. I knew how she felt. I saw what you did to her. I just felt it from a distance. I didn't care.”

“Did you ever care about them, Will? Alana, Jack, the people whose lives you saved, the ones you didn't -- was there a time you truly cared about any of them?”

“I care about Abigail.”

“Why is she different?”

“Why don't you tell me?”

Hannibal’s words wrapped around him, warm and intoxicating in a way that put the liquor to shame. “The concept of a family always felt foreign to you. Perpetually isolated by the banal imaginations of mankind, you resigned yourself to a life of solitude.” The words resonated, true for both of them, an echo in a claustrophobic chamber. The sound and response collapsing. “And then a spark of kinship was born in blood.

“Your attachment to Abigail may have begun as misfiring from the ghost of Hobbs,” Hannibal continued. “But you saw in her the potential of a darkness compatible with yours.”

“Trauma brings the family together,” Will said wryly.

“Trauma breaks the world into raw components. It offers a chance to rebuild with new meaning.”

“I'm amongst the broken pieces.”

Hannibal’s voice was low and rough. “I can give you and Abigail the world.”

“Your toll is too high,” Will forced out.

Hannibal was silent for a long, aching moment.

Will was terrified he would hang up.

“If all you see is ugliness,” Hannibal finally said in a raw voice, “Then don’t come tomorrow. You’ll never hear from me again. I won't come calling for you. Abigail will be safe from me as well. You can live a madenly polite life with your dogs and your demons. Walk away from it all, Will, if that's what you want.”

The call ended with a beep against his ear. Will felt the tears pool in the corners of his eyes and imagined, miles away, that Hannibal’s eyes had a similar sheen.

A Meal with the Devil

Chapter Summary

Unable to help himself, Hannibal reached out and stroked Will's jaw. He flinched, but allowed it. "Magnificent boy," he muttered, "I'd adore you even if you were a vegetarian."

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Will goes to see Abigail.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will finally went to sleep, he was unsure what he would do come morning. When he awoke, there was no question. During the drive through Virginia towards the coast, Will searched himself for the doubt he expected to feel, but he didn't find it. He was leaving the tethers of one reality behind and turning towards the welcoming arms of another.

He did found within himself self-repulsion and anger snarling and snapping like a pack of wild dogs. He felt ugly, and wondered if it showed.

The location Hannibal had specified was a small townhouse in Richmond. Will pulled up into the empty driveway and stepped out of the car, scanning at first the house and then the street. His eyes honed on one car, nicer than the rest. Predictably, elegantly, Hannibal stepped out and looked at Will. It was like he had stepped out of the conversations they had shared in Will's mind, an apparition in a cream windowpane suit. Somehow Hannibal seemed more real and solid than he had tied up in Matthew's shed, and the sight of him sharpened the fog Will had been living in the past few days. For a while Will just looked, and realized that everything was really happening.

Abigail was alive.

Will had murdered Matthew Brown.

Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper.

Finally Will crossed the street. They shared a look, as if confirming that they would not turn into smoke, and then Hannibal said, "I'm glad you came."

Will didn't know how to respond to the simple honesty of the statement, so he just nodded and ducked into the car. In Hannibal's benevolent presence, bolts were unlocking inside Will. Having shut down so completely for his survival, now he began to unfurl, and that -- that was

more terrifying than riding in a car with a cannibalistic serial killer. They drove in silence for a few minutes. Will kept glancing at Hannibal's hands on the steering wheel. He could see some yellow bruising around the wrist, and there was an almost imperceptible stiffness to them when Hannibal turned the wheel.

"Your acceptance is a heady feeling," Will said after long minutes of silence.

"I have always accepted you," Hannibal replied. "It has been uncommonly easy to do so."

"Still. I put you through hell."

"Did I not put you through similar?" Hannibal smiled, eyes briefly lifting from the road to look at him, and Will felt a similar smile twitch at his lips.

"You nearly kill me, I nearly kill you." Will's smile was bitter. "Even Stevens."

He could feel the doubt between them, uneasy, like holding a knife by the blade. The mutual ground between them was tenuous. Will could sever it with a flick of his wrist. Still, the silence between them wasn't uncomfortable, just intense.

The summer light suffused Hannibal's skin with a golden glow, running through the neat strands of his hair. His eyes moved languidly across the road, beneath the dramatic hood of his brow and the vulnerable skin of his eyelids.

The busy cities and towns surrounding Virginia beach disappeared entirely when they crossed the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay to the other side. They drove along a winding road with the ocean to their right, north as the land rose into rocky cliffs. Will spotted a house at the top of a cliff, slanted in the sunlight and perilously close to the edge.

Hannibal pulled up the gravel path towards the house. It was a one story modern home surrounded by bay windows in this side, better to see the view. There was a small Honda parked by the house and it looked like nothing Hannibal would ever drive, which was probably the point. Hannibal parked alongside it.

Will stepped out of the car and could taste the salt in the warm air. He looked over to the edge of the cliff, just a few steps away from the patio.

"The cliff is eroding," Hannibal explained, following Will's curiosity. "Soon the ocean will claim the earth beneath our feet, and the very foundation of the house."

Will stepped closer to look down the cliff edge, aware of Hannibal moving beside him like a second shadow. It was a sheer drop, and the waters whorled below, foam and jagged rocks. The height pulled at him, and he leaned back. "Between the devil and the deep blue sea," he muttered.

"Is that how you see this?" Hannibal asked softly. His eyes were more amber than dark red, lit up from the sunlight and watching Will like he was afraid he would disappear. "Choosing between two evils."

"I'm here, aren't I?" Will's voice was tight. *Isn't that enough* went unsaid.

Hannibal barely inclined his head in acknowledgement, and turned back to the house. Will followed him to the front door, which Hannibal held open for him, and Will couldn't keep his hands from shaking as he stepped through the threshold into the sunlit room. Even though Will knew what he would find inside, he wasn't prepared to see Abigail. And then he saw her, and everything fell into place.

She got up from one of the couches and turned towards him, her hair cut short into a bob and the scar across her neck on display, a line of pink on her pale skin. Her breath caught when she saw Will, her familiar blue eyes wide. For a moment they stood still and looked at each other, then Abigail's doe eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry," Abigail said, and she started bawling.

Will closed the space between them and took Abigail into his arms, feeling the heat of tears building behind his own eyes as well. She was solid in his arms, trembling and hiding her face in his chest, and gloriously, impossibly alive. "I'm sorry," she said again, sniffling, "I didn't know what to do, so I just did what he told me."

"It's okay," Will said, cradling her head, and Abigail's sobs redoubled. He rested his chin on her head. "It's okay." It wasn't, really, and Will felt a fierce surge of protectiveness for Abigail. He could feel her heartbeat against his chest.

She seemed healthy and unharmed, at least physically. But she had been with Hannibal this entire time. As soon as the question was raised in his mind, Will knew that Hannibal had not harmed Abigail. After all, Hannibal had no killed her, though he could. He might have tortured his victims to death, but Abigail was not his victim.

Abigail seemed to calm down in his arms and his soothing words, and she pulled away from him and wiped her eyes. "Sorry," she said, this time for crying. She frowned at the damp spots on his shirt from her tears, and looked up at him. "Are you okay?" she asked in a small voice.

"I'm better now." Will gave her a smile, and they disentangled from each other. Will looked over his shoulder to where Hannibal was watching them, face unreadable but not threatening. Will felt a stab of anger that Hannibal had let him think for so long that Abigail was dead, and that he was the one who had killed her.

"Abigail dear," Hannibal said, "Would you like to show Will around the property while I make lunch?"

"Sure," Abigail said with a little nod, rubbing the last tears from her eyes. "C'mon," she said to Will.

They went outside and walked along the cliff edge, in silence at first, sharing glances and small smiles. "I don't even know where to start," Abigail confessed at length, biting her lip. "There's just so much to say."

Will nodded. "Do you know what he is?" he asked.

Abigail paused, looking out at the sea. “He told me he's killed far more people than my father. At first it seemed safer not to ask questions, but then…” She shrugged. “Curiosity won out. He answered all of my questions. He just told me not to ask any questions I didn't want to hear the answers to.”

“What questions didn't you ask?”

Abigail gave him a shy smile. “If he would kill me if you didn't come. If the only reason he took care of me was to make you come back to him. What he… what he did to you.”

Will’s throat was tight. “Good questions.”

“He was only ever polite to me, you know. He never hurt me or threatened me.”

“Hannibal is at his most dangerous when he is subtly manipulating.”

“I guess making me an accomplice is a pretty blatant manipulation, actually,” Abigail said, kicking a rock down the path. “He said that faking my death was the only way to protect me. That it was coming to light that I had helped my father lure those girls.”

“He made me think I had killed you,” Will said bitterly.

“Yeah.” Abigail’s eyes were wide, but not full of fear. “I know. I… helped with that.” She sounded so painfully contrite that Will felt some of his bitterness melt away.

“You're not the one who should apologize,” Will said firmly.

“I'm not sure Hannibal knows how to apologize.”

They walked for a while more until the trail ended at a bluff. Abigail turned back to regard the slanted house, small above them. “He wouldn’t tell me what happened, when he came back,” she said. “Even after I asked. He just said he encountered you.”

Will couldn’t look at her. “Are you asking me?”

“Yes.”

Will nodded. Swallowed. “I kept him captive. I tried to kill him, and when I couldn’t do that, I tried to cut off his hands.” His lips pulled into a grimace. “Couldn’t do that either. So I left.”

He could feel Abigail looking at him, tension and discomfort ripe between them. “But you came back.”

“I did.”

“Why?”

It was such an innocent, obvious question, and Will laughed. “God,” he breathed, running a hand through his hair. He looked back at her. “I wanted to see you.”

Abigail smiled, slow and warm. “I’m worth putting up with Hannibal Lecter, huh?”

Will couldn’t help but chuckle at that, shaking his head lightly. Abigail pulled him into another hug. “Please don’t leave,” she said in a small voice.

Will put his arms around her. “How could I?”

They wandered back to the house. Abigail told Will how she had helped Hannibal in the antler room and then went into hiding at his instruction, waiting nervously for news of what had happened to Hannibal and Will. She had been horrified to learn of Will’s near-fatal wound to the leg, and furious at Hannibal for weeks afterwards. She stayed in part at Hannibal’s house in Baltimore, and in part at this safehouse.

“I tried to leave once,” she said, as they reached the house. “Once the locks came off the doors. I drove and drove and crawled into this motel, and I was sure that when he found me he would kill me. Only, when he found me he just offered me his hand and said, ‘Let’s go home.’” She touched her neck absentmindedly, loitering outside the front door. “I don’t think I would leave him, if I could,” Abail said, looking at Will with shame and hope. “Now? I know it’s messed up, but he feels too much like home.”

Lunch greeted them as they entered the house, the aroma wafting out from the kitchen where Hannibal was busy at work. “It will only be a few more minutes,” he called over his shoulder to them, “If you would both take a seat.”

This whole part of the house was an open plan, the couches and armchairs of the living room divided from the dining room table only by two steps. Will took a seat at the table, watching Hannibal from the kitchen as he plated their lunch. Abigail poured water at each place setting and sat across from Will, the head of the table of course left for Hannibal. She was also stealing glances towards the kitchen, nervous and alert for some reason.

“Abigail? Would you bring out the plates?”

“Sure.” Abigail swiftly got up from her chair and entered the kitchen. Will watched Hannibal dry his freshly washed hands, and then approach and take his seat. Abigail brought out the three plates, one balanced in the crook of her arm in a way that no doubt Hannibal had taught her, and Will realized that Hannibal’s wrists must be too weak to carry the dishes himself.

“Eggs benedict on a polenta patty with hollandaise and bacon,” Hannibal announced, edifying as always, and for a moment Will was thrown by the domesticity of the scene. He was sharing a meal with Hannibal as he had many times before, and with Abigail in company it felt strangely familiar. Will looked between them, how Abigail waited for Hannibal to finish speaking and pick up his own utensils before picking up hers, thanking him; and Will looked down at his two neat cylindrical stacks, a perfect circle of meat between the soft egg and polenta, and remembered that this was also a meal with the devil.

It smelled so good, and Will was ravenous. He hadn't eaten since midday yesterday, and it had been months since he had eaten a proper meal like this. But that bacon had not come

from a pig.

Abigail and Hannibal noticed that Will had yet to start eating. Hannibal didn't draw attention to it, happily taking neat bites from his own lunch, but Abigail became self conscious and her chewing slowed. “Bacon is any part of the pig that's been cured, isn't it?” Will asked dryly.

“Indeed,” Hannibal replied. “This pig had lovely flanks.” Abigail flinched.

Will picked up his fork and lifted the egg from the bacon and polenta. For a moment he considered not eating at all, then he dug into the egg. Hannibal had killed someone for this meal. Instead of a soft yolk spilling across the plate, Will saw blood. Visions of carnage and the precise hand of this butcher vibrated under his skin, and, embarrassingly, it was thrilling. “You're still not tired of that old joke?” Will prodded as he dislodged the disk of meat so he could eat the polenta beneath.

“There's no wool over your eyes,” Hannibal said, quietly irritated that Will was picking his meal apart. “In truth I have always enjoyed feeding and providing.”

Will could taste the meat lingering on the patty, and god, everything tasted so good. It was just meat now, wasn't it? It wasn't like Will was disgusted, but he was pissed that Hannibal hadn't accommodated him. Abigail had stopped eating the meat too, picking at her greens, looking guiltily at Will.

“Not feeling hungry, Abigail?” Hannibal asked, because of fucking course he would. But before she could answer, Will cut through the disk of bacon with the side of his fork, and all eyes were back on him.

Will gave Abigail a small smile that he hoped was reassuring, and brought the meat to his lips. The taste was overwhelming, salty and fatty and perfectly fried. It was the first thing Will had really tasted in months. He chewed and chewed and the flavor unfolded over and over, life and death and eating, and Will felt a flood of emotion on his tongue like spring after a bitter winter. Will swallowed but a lump remained. Christ, was he going to cry over people-bacon?

Hannibal was practically beaming at him.

“Excuse me.” Will pushed from his seat suddenly, the taste of flesh ripe on his tongue. He wandered to the back hallway in search of the bathroom. There were three bedrooms on this side of the house, a master suite, a plain guest room, and what was surely Abigail’s room. Will found the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and splashed his face with water.

This was so fucked up. A small storm twisted between Will’s ribs, contradictions and feelings so inappropriate that there was at least no longer any doubt that Will was made *wrong* , deformed, that he was as monstrous as the killers he chased. Guilt was the only thing that separated him from someone like Hannibal, and guilt was eating him up from the inside. Will liked it. God, the first thing Will had thought upon seeing Matthew in the freezer was *‘it's beautiful’* followed swiftly by *‘it's for me’* .

Will stared at his dripping face in the mirror. H e barely looked like himself, face thin and beard grown in, hair curling long at his neck. But he also saw how Hannibal saw him: feral, magnificent, all sharp edges ready to be turned outward instead of on himself. Eyes that could strip the skin from sinners. He felt so powerful. Will stared at his reflection until the water dried from his skin. There was a knock on the door. “Will?” Hannibal said. “Are you alright?”

Will opened the door and crowded Hannibal in the narrow hall. He wanted to bite a chunk out of him.

“I apologize Will,” Hannibal began to say. “That was not well done of me. It is far more important--”

“You're not sorry,” Will snarled. “Don't you dare lie to me. You think I want apologies? You think there are any words you can string together with that serpent tongue of yours that come close to paying penance for anything you've done?”

Despite being interrupted, Hannibal shut his mouth and heard Will out. His eyes were blazing, but not with anger. Even chastised, Hannibal was loving this.

“It seemed foolish to hide my nature from you now,” Hannibal explained.

Will swallowed against the taste still in his mouth. “What if I never want to eat them?” he asked, all of the venom drawn from his voice. The way Hannibal looked at him then, eyes shining and like he desperately wanted to hold him, sent chills down Will’s spine. He knew why he was receiving that look. ‘Never’ implied that Will was staying.

Unable to help himself, Hannibal reached out and stroked Will’s jaw. He flinched, but allowed it. “Magnificent boy,” he muttered, “I’d adore you even if you were a vegetarian.”

Will flushed and huffed a small laugh, Hannibal’s fingers ghosting down the side of his neck and dropping away. “What if I went vegan, huh?”

Hannibal made a face, and Will couldn't help but grin. “Jesus Christ,” he muttered, balking at the absurdity. “We… we need to talk about this.”

“Shall I make you something else?” Hannibal offered. “You need to eat more.”

Will shrugged but agreed. He emerged into the main room with Hannibal on his heels. Abigail was washing dishes in the kitchen. She gave Will a nervous, guilty glance. His uneaten eggs benedict was still perfectly stacked on the plate next to the sink. Will walked over to her, needing to diffuse the tension, but what was he supposed to say? *I don’t mind if you’re a cannibal, Abigail?*

“Do you get it now?” she said bitterly, scrubbing the utensils aggressively. “I told you I'm stained.”

“Well, then you're in good company.”

“I'm guessing you're not going to finish that?” Abigail gave his half-eaten plate a glare.

Will took the plate and scraped off the food into the trash. “Thanks for washing the dishes,” Will said, putting the plate in the sink. “I'm not mad, or disgusted,” he offered.

“Sure. Why would you be?” Abigail said sarcastically. She shook her hands dry in the sink, face sullen. “It's just meat.”

“Look,” Will started, but he didn’t know what to say.

“It’s alright.” Abigail gave him a tight smile. “I’m going to study in my room for a bit. Don’t murder each other while I’m gone, okay?”

Will watched her go with a sigh, leaning against the counter. Hannibal came in the kitchen from where he had been hovering. “Coffee?” he asked.

“Sure.” Will rubbed his eyes. In a few minutes, Hannibal pressed a warm cup in his hands. He sipped from it while Hannibal made him an open-faced sandwich. “You're grooming Abigail to become a killer,” Will eventually said.

“Abigail is already a killer,” Hannibal replied, not looking up from his work. His hands were stiff, and even slicing cheese and spreading mustard were awkward, slow movements.

“There's a difference between self defense and whatever… you are.”

Hannibal smiled faintly. “This reminds me of a conversation we had before, only at the time you positioned yourself as a killer like me.” Hannibal brought the plate back to the table and they sat down, facing each other.

“I remember,” Will said, after a few minutes of eating. Of course Hannibal knew how to make a vegetarian sandwich taste this good. “I wondered what you would do if I killed someone. Now I know the answer is ‘put them in a frozen bouquet’.”

“Is Abigail so different than you and I?” Hannibal asked.

“That's not --” Will lowered his voice, harsh. “She's just trying to survive. You think you're going to win favor with me for your polite treatment of her? If she wasn't molding to your vision, we both know she would be on your table.”

Hannibal's eyes narrowed. “What, exactly, do you take issue with?”

Will glared at him for a moment, tongue between teeth. “You took her family away, and then manipulated her into playing a part in yours. You made her an accomplice in her own murder and kept her captive.”

Hannibal looked unimpressed, his eyes cold. “You killed her father, Will, not I.”

“You’re the one who -- no, you know what? I’m not arguing about this. Abigail deserves better than this.”

“I’m trying to give Abigail the best possible life,” Hannibal said. “She will want for nothing. She will see the world and know what it means to be truly free, accepted for every facet of

herself. You had a chance to give her a life free from my influence. I gave you that option last night. You didn’t take it.” Hannibal placed his hands on the lip of the table and leaned forward, his eyes boring into Will’s. “Why didn’t you take it?”

For a long moment, Will just stared back. He licked the back of his teeth. For a moment he wanted to keep the answer from Hannibal, to deprive him of everything in Will's power to provide. But eventually, Will succumbed to the need for Hannibal to know. “The only way for me to understand myself… is here.”

Hannibal’s feature warmed with fondness. More even than that, with understanding. There was so much more to say between them, plenty more for Will to extricate and accuse and curse, but god if Hannibal didn't know him. And that, more than the cursed sustenance on his tongue, broke spring from the frozen confines of winter. “I want to tell you everything,” Will confessed in barely a whisper. “I need you to know me.”

“Do you see now,” Hannibal said, equally reverent, “How abhorrent it would be for me to change you? To make you something you aren't, rather than coax forth your natural inclinations.”

“‘Coax’ implies elegant subtly. Anything that is done with elegance is excused in your book.”

“I don't need to make excuses for myself, or for you. Do you still need yours?”

Will took a slow breath. "Maybe," he admitted. "I'm still angry."

Hannibal leaned back in his chair, relaxed and languid like a large cat, and practically purred his next words. "Do you still wish to hurt me?"

"Yes," Will breathed, feeling rope and water and the handle of a blade beneath his hands, and tasting copper-sweet blood across his tongue.

Chapter End Notes

the boys got some stuff to work out, but did y'all seriously think i would put you through all of this and not come out the other side with hannigram and murder fam? I'm not THAT cruel.

come say hi on tumblr!

Reversal

Chapter Summary

“More drink, Will?” Hannibal asked from close behind him. The way he said his name curled serpentine around his spine.

“I haven't managed to drink myself to death yet,” Will said flippantly.

“Not for lack of trying.”

He could feel the heat radiating from Hannibal’s body against his back. His breath on his neck. Like he was sensitized to him. “Is that why you’re here?” Will asked with a hint of venom. “To make sure I don't take away something you consider yours?”

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Hannibal and Will finally fuck through their feelings.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone! we’re approaching the end of this series. I’m not sure how many chapters are left — there’s stuff that happens in this verse before the murder fam leaves the country, but I don’t know how necessary it is to write that all out. there’s already been so much plot in this fic and not enough porn.

anyway, have some porn!

NOTE: they switch in this chapter. as in, Will takes the dom/top role, and pushes Hannibal pretty hard. Hannibal ultimately loves it (bc it's hannibal) but he definitely has some of his limits pushed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being in Hannibal’s company was always easy. Somehow Will always felt welcome, and rarely awkward in his presence, even scaling ladders during therapy or ditching dinner parties. Hannibal was always playing host.

So when Hannibal suggested they retire to the lounge to read, Will went easily. More conversation between them now was likely to boil over into something untamable. Will picked a book from the shelf by the fireplace, the first one in english he could find, and settled on the couch while Hannibal sat in the armchair with a small old book. A while later, Abigail came out with an ipad and headphones and curled up on the other end of the couch, practicing Spanish in a whisper. Will took her feet in his lap at some point and she stretched out fully.

Will wasn't really reading. Mostly he was listening to Abigail and Hannibal breathe. And he was making excuses. A rational person would have killed Hannibal or gone to the FBI with everything he knew. If Will had told Jack the truth, he would have forfeited Abigail’s life; but he could still go to Jack and get help, take a hair from the brush in Abigail’s room and that would be proof enough, lure Hannibal away from her long enough for Jack to mount a rescue. His own life might be forfeit at that point, but at least Abigail would be safe and Hannibal might be caught. But Will wasn't going to do that, even if it might save Abigail from a monstrous life.

Will tried to put reason to his decision but he already knew why, and it wasn't logical.

Hannibal set aside his book and began to perform a series of exercises for his wrists and hands, flexing and strengthening by squeezing a small resistance device. Will couldn't look away. Hannibal had his sleeves rolled up and Will could see small, pink-white scars across his forearm from the barbed wire. AT this point, it didn’t really matter if Hannibal had conducted Will in his hypnotic state to perform the design in the antler room, or if Will had moved on his own subconscious instinct. He was not a puppet on Hannibal strings. They were bound together.

Watching Hannibal repair the damage to his hands was too much. Will’s own hands ached with every pulse of blood and a headache was blooming behind his eyes. Hannibal’s hands, elegant and veined, squeezed so weakly.

The reason: Will couldn't take Hannibal's hands.

Will tipped his head back on the couch and pinched the bridge of his nose. His chest felt tight, and he had to breathe through his mouth.

Hannibal suggested that Will rest before dinner and he went to the guest room without complaint. Abigail brought him aspirin and some water. “Are you okay?” she asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Will tossed back two aspirin and shook his head. “I tortured him for three days, and now we’re playing house.” He didn't know why he was telling her this. Maybe he wanted forgiveness.

“Drink the water, you’re going to ruin the lining of your esophagus,” Abigail admonished, handing him the glass.

Will took a few sips. “I didn't give him water. I kept his hands bound too tight for circulation. I practically waterboarded him, and it's still not enough, not what he deserves.”

Abigail sighed, and nudged his shoulder so Will would lie down. “Well, he’s still looking at you with puppy eyes, so I think you're forgiven.”

“I shouldn't be.” Will closed his eyes. “He shouldn't be.”

“Maybe none of us deserves forgiveness,” Abigail said. “I helped keep Miriam Lass in a coma. Moved her limbs so they wouldn't fall asleep and rot off.”

“Comparing scars?”

He heard her smile. “I'm just saying. Maybe that's why we can forgive each other. We’ve all done really fucked up things.”

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Will actually managed to fall asleep for a few hours. When he woke up it was to find Hannibal and Abigail in the kitchen and the sky turning to dusk out the bay windows. Hannibal was standing behind Abigail and showing her how to slice properly, his own hands too weak to cut with his normal efficient grace. Will took a seat at the table, watching them.

“Who’s for dinner?” Will asked.

Startled, both Abigail and Hannibal glanced at him. Their movements were oddly synchronized. “Our lunch was a cat caller,” Hannibal answered lightly, giving Abigail’s arm a squeeze. “I thought seafood would be more agreeable to all of our palettes.”

“Is that how you choose them?” Will asked. “Chivalrous acts?”

“Not quite,” Hannibal replied, as he moved the next ingredients for Abigail to cut. “Whenever possible, one should endeavour to eat the rude.”

“You kill rude people.” Although absurd, it fit. Hannibal was somewhat obsessed with etiquette and decorum, and treated his victims like swine, ugliness only elevated by his corpse displays and meals.

“It's not quite vigilantism,” Hannibal joked. Then, to Abigail, “Cut from your left at an angle, using your left hand as a guide. Good.”

Will watched them prepare dinner. Hannibal must have procured fresh fish while Will was napping; he would never cook a frozen fish. Will helped Abigail set the table when she was

done being sous-chef. Hannibal poured each of them a small amount of white wine.

The plates looked more like a floral arrangement than dinner, with the salmon decorated with multicolored beetroots, sprigs of thyme, and razor thin slices of lemon. The fish -- alaska salmon -- was barely cooked, still bright orange and tender.

“ *Mi-cuit* roughly translates to partially cooked,” Hannibal explained, sitting regally at the head of the table. “The fish is cured in a brine, the salt making work of the proteins much the same way heat would. The fish is then cooked *sous-vide* , and refrigerated until the texture sets. The result is a remarkable flavor and feel.”

Will examined the cold fish with interest. “Here I thought I’d encountered all the ways to prepare fish,” he said mildly. The fish cut easily under his knife.

“There’s as much pleasure in expanding palettes as defying expectations,” Hannibal replied.

The fish was delicious, of course, the flavor melting on his tongue and complemented nicely by the beetroot. Will drank his wine greedily, wishing for more, but Hannibal was sparing with refills. That was probably for the best, considering the taste of wine had Will wanting to throw himself deep into his bottles.

It was too easily to slip into Hannibal’s mannerisms and way of thinking, to be caught up in the beauty of the candlelit scene, the surreality of Abigail eating across the table from him. For a long moment, Will wondered if he was still in his cell in the BSHCI and this was all an elaborate delusion. If it was, he didn't want to wake up.

“I should head back after dinner,” Will said. “The dogs need to be let out.”

He detected a flare of annoyance from Hannibal, quickly smoothed behind his mask. “Has your pack returned to you?”

“Yes. Just yesterday, actually.”

“How are they?” Abigail asked.

“They're well,” Will said. “Alana picked up a stray of her own, actually.”

Abigail smiled. “Because seven visiting dogs weren't enough?”

“Apparently. It is addicting. You think ‘what's one more?’ And then you're a veritable crazy dog man.” Abigail and Will were smiling at each other.

“I'll drive you back after dinner,” Hannibal said. The irritation was still there, under the surface. It pissed Will off, but he didn't comment on it.

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A while later they were on the road, Will having hugged Abigail tightly goodbye, pressing his cheek against the top of her head. It was difficult to leave her, even for his dogs. He couldn't know, really, that he would see Abigail again. This could all be one of Hannibal's elaborate tortures.

“Are you going to take her away again?” Will asked aloud, watching the dark swath of ocean pass by the window as they drove.

“Will you give me reason to?” Hannibal asked back.

“That's some threat hanging over my head,” Will sneered.

“Not a threat. Merely honesty.”

“Haven't we already established that I can neither capture you nor kill you nor mutilated you?”

“With all of my foresight, I could never entirely predict you,” Hannibal said. “Even now, I am accurately aware of your capacity to harm me.”

“Betrayal requires expectation,” Will said, echoing from the past. “It requires trust.”

“So does forgiveness.”

“We’re at a stalemate then. A zero-sum game.”

“Perhaps,” was all Hannibal said, flat as his stony features.

It was only a few miles after Will switched to his car that he realized that Hannibal was following him. He wasn't exactly being sneaky about it, but even if Will hadn't spotted his car, he would be able to feel Hannibal's presence shadowing him.

Hannibal couldn't leave him alone.

It was fully dark and late when Will reached his home. Hannibal wasn't behind him at that point, but Will knew he would be there soon. Maybe Hannibal had decided to kill him on a whim, or was watching him to make sure he didn't call Jack. Neither thought particularly concerned him. Will let out the dogs and threw a ball for them in the dark for a while. The summer night was balmy, and there was light enough from the moon to see by. At least he wasn't too broken to enjoy his dogs’ company.

When Will had tired them out and went back inside, Hannibal was near. He hadn't heard his car nor saw him, but he could smell him, a sweet darkness on the air. The dogs poured into the house, following their noses to the newcomer, in whatever shadow he was hidden. Will poured himself some whiskey. “Not done with me yet?” he asked the quiet house. There was no answer, just the sound of the dogs settling into their beds and pawing around the house.

Will stood by the window, his back to the room. An obvious lure. The whiskey burned on his tongue, cheap, stripping away the taste of human flesh still lingering from lunch.

“More drink, Will?” Hannibal asked from close behind him. The way he said his name curled serpentine around his spine.

“I haven't managed to drink myself to death yet,” Will said flippantly.

“Not for lack of trying.”

He could feel the heat radiating from Hannibal’s body against his back. His breath on his neck. Like he was sensitized to him. “Is that why you’re here?” Will asked with a hint of venom. “To make sure I don't take away something you consider yours?”

Will turned around, and Hannibal’s eyes were dark with desperate hunger and longing; and Will wanted, he wanted so badly, to sink his fingers into flesh and to be back in the antler room, flaying Hannibal with barbed wire and laughing through a mouthful of blood as he slit his own throat. He wanted to fall back in time to some innocent past that never existed. He wanted to pick Hannibal apart at the seams to see how all the pieces fit together.

When Hannibal’s hands fell on him, his touch was like lightning licking up Will’s spine. He had expected violence, claiming grasps and the outpouring of Hannibal’s hunger into his mouth, not this: hands smoothing gently up and down his back over his shirt, warm and steady. Will gasped like he had been struck, an aching sound in the back of his throat, wavering on his feet. Hannibal held him upright, nose pressed against his curls with a calm inhalation. Will wasn't trapped, not caged against the wall, just held. “Will,” Hannibal breathed against his temple, squeezing his waist.

Will shoved him back with a snarl. Whiskey sloshed over them both. Hannibal went easily, palms turned up in surrender, hurt in his eyes. It wasn't enough. Will threw the tumbler aside, heard it clank and roll on the ground. “Fuck you,” Will snapped, shoving him back again, and again, a hard push against his shoulders until Hannibal hit the adjacent wall; and he just let Will, just looked at him, even when Will pulled his fist back and cracked him across the jaw. Hannibal turned his face back, expectant, a bright red mark from Will’s fist. Like he wanted another. It wasn't enough. A growl in the back of his throat, Will pulled his fist back again -- and drove it into the wall next to Hannibal’s head.

“Fuck you,” Will repeated weakly, knuckles throbbing against the wall and head hanging. “You don't get to be gentle with me. To touch me.” His other hand came up to support himself and prevent him from falling into Hannibal, head low between trembling shoulders.

“I won't touch you if you don't want me to,” Hannibal said calmly.

A high, frustrated noise coiled in the back of Will’s throat. “Now you care about my agency?”

“I have always cared, Will.”

“Cared enough to fuck me without my knowledge.”

“You asked me to take you apart.”

“I asked you to put me back together!” Will shouted. Hannibal look was challenging. He wanted to build Will up greater than before, gold seams where previously he had shattered. “Did it get you off?” Will accused, “Negotiating boundaries with me in the light of day and violating my mind at night? Taking care of me while my brain was on fire and preventing me from getting treatment?”

“The dismantling of boundaries between us has always been arousing,” Hannibal admitted. His hands were kept at his sides “I no longer want you inhibited.”

Will laughed bitterly. The strength and anger was sapping out of him. “You don’t regret it at all, do you?” he asked faintly. “Even if you could feel regret, you wouldn’t.”

Almost imperceptibly, Hannibal froze beneath him. Will curled his hands into fists against the wall. “If the encephalitis had taken you, I would have been devastated,” Hannibal said roughly. “But undoubtedly safer. I could have kept this comfortable life, one that I had spent so long cultivating.”

It took Will a moment to process. “You gambled with my life.”

“And my own.”

“You're not supposed to care.” The last word came out choked and bitter. He could still feel Hannibal’s hands on him, and, god, what was he supposed to do with this poisonous wanting? His head rested on Hannibal’s shoulder as his whole body sagged with the weakness of his need and rejection. Hannibal placed his hands on his back again, still over the solid expanse of his ribs, feeling each expansion. Will groaned, clenched his fists against the wall.

“If you need to hurt me, you may,” Hannibal said, cheek brushing his head.

“I already hurt you,” Will said tightly, not meaning the punch. “It didn't work.”

“It’s by your will that I live,” Hannibal said, one hand coming up to the back of Will’s neck, squeezing the tense muscles. “That I suffered.”

Will turned his head into Hannibal’s collar, leaning into the dry and familiar scent. “I want to cut you out,” Will said harshly even as he leaned closer so their chests touched. Saying it aloud betrayed his conflicted desire -- he couldn't. A part of him didn't want to reject Hannibal. Will whimpered, and Hannibal tightened his arms around him. “Oh god,” Will whispered as he melted into the embrace, legs trembling. “I feel crazy.”

There was heat between them. Hannibal continued to stroke his back, not sexual but not clinical either. Intimate. “You are no longer beholden by reality,” Hannibal said, pressing cheek to cheek. “But bending reality to match the landscape of your mind. We are beyond the scope of normalcy and rational thinking; you can not let either prevent you from your becoming.”

Will sagged against Hannibal. One of his knees slid between Hannibal's legs. He could feel the pulse from Hannibal's neck beneath his lips. "I'm lost," he muttered.

"What do you feel?" Hannibal asked.

"You feel good." Will pressed himself up against Hannibal, and Hannibal's arms tightened fractionally around him. Just holding. Will lowered his trembling hands off the wall to Hannibal's shoulders, one moving to the side of his neck. Will pressed his mouth to the other side, not a kiss, but Hannibal sighed and trembled. "Fuck," Will cursed. He could smell the blood beneath Hannibal's skin.

Will snared his hand in Hannibal's hair and brought their lips together, firm and closed-lipped. Unlike in the shed, Hannibal was pliant against him, letting Will slide against his lips, soft and then, with a gasp, the hot stripe of Will's tongue, opening the kiss. Hannibal fisted Will's shirt, pulling him as close as possible. Hannibal met Will's every move with a tenderness that was pointed, savoring the taste and heat and slick tangle of their tongues. He let Will bite at his lip, suck hard, and force his tongue deep. The intensity and familiarity was shocking, pooling heat low in his belly.

The kiss grew rough, and Hannibal growled in the back of his throat. Will chased the sound with tongue and teeth, hands dropping to grab his ass and yank him against Will's thigh. Hannibal gasped and Will stole the breath from him, needing to shatter his controlled facade. He could feel Hannibal's erection firming up against his thigh. His own arousal was buzzing through his skin, but he wasn't hard yet, wasn't sure he could get there fully. He hadn't been able to since the antler room.

"Will," Hannibal breathed against his mouth.

"Don't talk," Will growled. He grabbed Hannibal by the hips and pushed him roughly against the wall, off his leg. "I don't want to hear it." Hannibal was panting faintly, arousal darkening his half-lidded eyes. Will took one of Hannibal's hands from his back and brought it between them. He traced the palm with his thumb, watching the trepidation and excitement flicker across Hannibal's face.

Will took his fingers into a crushing grip. Hannibal only reacted by going still, swallowing against the pain as Will squeezed tighter. The tension in his body betrayed the pain, but after a moment Hannibal eased into it, breathing deeply.

Will bent the wrist back suddenly, and Hannibal's mouth parted in a silent gasp of pain. The sight went straight to Will's dick. "You think our lives belong to you," Will whispered, watching the cracks form in Hannibal's mask. Will pinned the hand roughly to the wall, leaning his weight in. Hannibal grunted involuntarily in pain and it shot heat through Will's body. "You think Abigail's living on borrowed time," he went on, "Like the scar on her neck will reopen on your command. But she doesn't belong to you. You know why?"

Will leaned in to Hannibal's ear, grinding the heel of his hand down against Hannibal's vulnerable wrist. "Because your hands belong to me."

Hannibal groaned, loudly and not entirely in pain. “Do you intend to change me into something I’m not?” Hannibal asked in a husky voice, breath short.

Will took his other hand and pinned it as well, pressure on them both. He slid his leg back between Hannibal’s thighs to find him as hard as Will expected. This was exciting him. “I’ve already changed you,” Will said, lips brushing the shell of his ear. “The moment we met, you changed your MO and started taking risks. I made you excellerate.”

Hannibal tipped his head back against the wall. “Yes,” he breathed.

Will pushed off of Hannibal’s hands, and he grunted in pain. Will took a few steps back. “Take off your clothes,” he heard himself say.

For a moment Hannibal stayed with his hands against the wall, panting and staring back at Will. A moment of hesitation, considering disobedience. He lowered his arms and opened and closed his hands, feeling the stiffness and ache. Then, decided, Hannibal began to undress -- pulling off his suit jacket and folding it over a chair, loosening his tie and unbuttoning his shirt. Will watched as he exposed every inch of flesh underneath: the swath of grey hair across his chest, thick muscles with some softness around the middle and hips. Will felt relaxed and confident as he watched. Hannibal was obeying him. It was an intoxicating feeling.

Soon Hannibal was completely naked and his clothes were folded neatly on the chair. His cock hung heavy between his legs, twitching as Will’s eyes fell upon it. “On the bed,” Will said. “On your stomach.”

Hannibal gave him one last look before walking over to the bed, weaving between some of the dogs without a care. A few lifted their heads in interest, and Zoe waddled after Hannibal, trying to get his attention. Will whistled for their attention and shepherded them upstairs, to the bedroom he used when he wasn’t paranoid or too drunk to get up the stairs. He got them all settled on the bed, and for a moment wanted to cuddle up with them and forget Hannibal; but there was a heat in his chest and loins that he couldn’t ignore.

Will was almost surprised to see Hannibal laying on the bed exactly as he directed. His hands were folded above his head, face tilted to one side, calm and relaxed in the dark. He said nothing as Will climbed up on the bed fully dressed, and allowed his arms to be moved so that both of his hands were resting at the small of his back. “Quiet and pliant,” Will muttered, kneeling on one side of Hannibal. “You think I don’t see you fortifying yourself?”

“I never quite know what to expect from you,” Hannibal answered lightly, like his cock wasn’t still hard against the mattress. “At times like this, you are opaque to me.”

Will placed one knee on Hannibal’s hands. “Ah,” Hannibal said, in understanding, the sound transforming into a grunt as Will put his weight on the knee.

Will ran his hand up Hannibal’s leg, from his ankle to the swell of his ass. He squeezed the supple flesh there, considering. Then, he brought his hand up, and brought it hard across Hannibal’s rear.

Hannibal made no sound, tensing for a moment, and Will watched the flesh darken. It was warmer to the touch. Will squeezed against the mark, and then slapped Hannibal again. The sound was sharp and satisfying, and reverberated through his hand. Hannibal was holding his tongue, but Will was determined to loosen it. Will slapped his ass and the backs of his thighs until both were bright red. He varied the placement and rhythm, making Hannibal twitch and clench his ass in anticipation. The real pain would be in his hands, and Will subtly shifted his weight against them.

Hannibal let out a gasp as a particularly hard slap caught him off guard, right in the center. The sound became a moan as Will palmed him roughly, hand sliding down and up the inside of his thigh, fingers brushing his balls and perineum. Will braced his other hand between Hannibal's shoulders, feeling him breathe hard. Will spread his thighs apart, and slapped on the innermost part.

"Ahh," Hannibal grunted, and then hissed as Will dug his knee into his hands. "Will, ah--" Hannibal bit back his words. The sound throbbed through Will's cock, half hard in his pants.

"You like it when I punish you like the naughty boy you are?" Will asked. The words were mocking, but Will could tell they turned Hannibal on. He slipped his hand underneath Hannibal and grabbed his cock, maneuvering it so it lay down between his thighs, heavy and hot to the touch. Will pressed his thumb to the head, feeling the dampness there. "You don't have to answer. I can see that you do."

Will smacked him again, nearly hitting his testes, and Hannibal made a strangled noise. Will dug his nails into the red, swollen flesh of his ass, seeing the skin pale around the indentations. The pain had built up to a point where Hannibal was gasping, each slap forcing a sound from him, and when Will kept his hand raised Hannibal's hole clenched in anticipation, tending just as much for the strikes that didn't fall. Will hit him, over and over. His hand ached. Hannibal's cock was leaking steadily against the sheets. "Will, *s'il te plait*," Hannibal whimpered into the sheets.

"Do you want me to stop?" Will asked in a rough voice.

"Non, Will --" Hannibal caught his breath. "I'm simply worried about the recovery--"

Will bent down, putting most of his weight on his knee, and bit Hannibal on the ass. Hannibal screamed, turning his face into the mattress, and tensed all over. The skin broke, blood washing over Will's tongue, and Hannibal bucked him off. "Ahh, ah -- Will!" Hannibal panted. He trembled all over, trying to keep himself from fighting Will off.

"Be a good boy, and stay still," Will said cruelly, lifting up. The bite mark was livid and bloody against already swollen skin. His blood tasted incredible, salty sweet and coppery, too intense. Will wanted more.

"Please, Will. Hurt me all you want, only--"

Will slapped the bite mark. Hannibal tensed from head to toe, soundless. Will glanced at this face to see his eyes wide and mouth parted in a silent scream. His eyes were wet. "Worried

about permanent damage?" Will mocked. "Thought you'd like the idea of walking around with marks of mine."

Hannibal screwed up his eyes, jaw tense. Will could see how much his hands were hurting him, far more than his bruising ass. Watching him struggle not to fight back made Will flush with dark power, cock straining against the confines of his pants. "Say it, Hannibal," Will hissed.

Hannibal ground his teeth together. Will slapped him again, lighter, atop his dick. Hannibal keened, and Will hit across the bite again, turning that sound into a loud wail. "Stop," Hannibal bit out. "Please stop. Release my hands."

Will dug two of his fingers into the cleft of Hannibal's ass and pressed against his hole. "Is this the limit that you'll bend to me?" he asked. "We reached it so quickly." He rubbed his fingers, knowing the dry sensation would be jarring, the pressure on the outside teasing. "I should bind your hands in gauze, make you eat off the floor like a dog."

"Will--"

"You never begged like this when you couldn't get away," Will said, grabbing a handful of Hannibal's hair and pressing just within his hole. He was incredibly tight around his fingers. "You want to prove to me that you won't resist. That I can do to you what I want. I can feel you struggling against yourself." He dug his finger in meanly. Hannibal was breathing hard against the sheets, on the last tethers of his control. "To not fight me off. To not fuck me into submission."

Will knew he had hit the mark. All of a sudden, Hannibal relaxed, trembling all over. Will's fingers slipped to the hilt inside of him, and Will gasped. Tension he didn't realize was there bled out. It was as good a sign of submission from Hannibal as any.

"Good boy," Will muttered, stroking him from the inside. He was ridiculously hot and velvety, throbbing around Will's fingers.

"Will," Hannibal moaned.

"I know it hurts. Just a little longer."

Hannibal sank a little further into the bed, rolling his hips as best he could with Will's weight pinning him down. "*S'il te plait*," he gasped, but the fight had gone out of him.

Finally, Will removed his knee from Hannibal's hands, and the sound of pain at that relief put all the others to shame. Hannibal was breathless, sweat on his brow, and utterly unable to move his hands. Will slipped his fingers out of Hannibal, and he growled weakly in protest. Will sat between his legs, and unbent Hannibal's arms so they were resting by his sides. "Take them if you want," Hannibal said harshly, looking down the bed towards Will. "Reopen the wound. Cripple me. Tell me not to touch without your permission and I'll be as careful as Midas should have. Only, don't stop."

The fervor of his words hit Will like a scorching ray, and suddenly he couldn't ignore his own arousal any long. "Fuck," Will hissed, and bent to lick at the bite mark. Hannibal's musk and arousal and blood was on his tongue, the skin hot under his mouth. Will moaned and sucked at the wound, following the taste down to Hannibal's cock and balls, mouthing at them. Hannibal was groaning shamelessly. Will never remembered him being this loud, or slipping into foreign curses. Even at his most desperate, Hannibal had never sounded broken like this, never trembled like Will's hands were fire. Never yielded. Never begged to be fucked. Will's French was creole but he caught that much.

Will squeezed his cock through his pants and bit Hannibal's thigh. Hastily, desperate, he fumbled at the clasp of his pants and shoved them down his legs, jerking himself a few times. Sparks shot up his spine. Will growled in frustration and got off his stomach, shucking his pants and underwear off.

"*Baise moi* , Will," Hannibal begged, lifting his ass off the bed. The sight burned him out from the inside -- Hannibal's red, bruised ass and thighs, the bloody marks of his teeth on one cheek, the dark tip of his cock rubbing in a pool of precome on the sheets.

Will choked. "Ha-Hannibal."

Hannibal's hips jerked.

Will scrambled into place, and slid his cock between Hannibal's cheeks, pinning him back down to the bed. Even if Will could get inside his ass right now, he wouldn't last a minute. "Say it," Will growled. "Beg me."

Hannibal grinded his ass up and down Will's cock. "Please, Will," Hannibal said, and there was no false desperation in his voice. "Please fuck me. I need your cock. I need --" Hannibal nearly sobbed. "I need you. Everything. Anything. Take me. Just -- please don't leave me."

Will bit his lip hard, and took his cock in hand. He pressed up against Hannibal's hole, dry and barely stretched. He thrust the leaking head of his cock against his entrance, not hard enough to force his way inside, slipping up and down when he missed. It felt too good to last. He was driving Hannibal mad, denying him, just catching on his rim only to pull back.

Hannibal made a desperate, angry, animal sound. He reached behind himself with limp hands and tried to hold himself open for Will. He forced one finger of each hand inside and stretched himself open, forcing his tight rim, and Will saw inside of him. Will pressed his cockhead against his hole, slipping just between his fingers, and then Will was coming, spilling his seed into Hannibal, rocking in just an inch and out again to watch his come mark Hannibal's entrance. He could feel the orgasm in his toes. It didn't seem to end, shaking through him as he came and came.

Hannibal whimpered as his fingers slipped in and out of himself, feeling the slick of Will's come. Will removed his fingers and replaced them with three of his own, pushing in ruthlessly and down until he found the tiny nub of his prostate. He gripped his cock with the other hand, stroking him hard, and in just a minute Hannibal was coming too with a weak sound. The way he clenched around Will's fingers made his head spin.

Will finally sat back on his heels, utterly spent. Hannibal was a mess before him, limp save for a trembling in his legs and shoulders, and quiet once again. Will wanted to hold him and press kisses to his abused hands, and the familiar bile raised at that wanting -- the tangle of guilt and rage and doubt, the repulsion, all coalescing into the kind of ugly neediness Will had fought to eradicate within himself for as long as he could remember. Suddenly, Will needed Hannibal to see it.

Will lay down next to Hannibal and nudged him until he turned on his side. He wasn't startled to see Hannibal crying silently, though he had never seen it before. Will felt it. Mirror neurons or something more, Will's own eyes filled, his chest squeezing with an ache they both shared. Will saw a vision of Hannibal dropping a china teacup, the pieces shattering on the ground; how he would watch and wait, and be denied. But this time, Hannibal bent and scooped up the pieces, trying to fit them together. His hands bled.

"You dropped me," Will whispered, a tear slipping down his cheek.

Hannibal reached up and caressed his cheek with a weak hand, thumbing the tear. Will held his hand there, against him. "I did," he answered. For once his words seemed fragile. "Even the pieces are beautiful. Each new facet and razor-edge more resplendent than the last. Your cruelty is a blessing. If it's all you ever give me, it will nourish me to the end of my days."

"Only don't leave." Will spoke Hannibal's words for him. "Because I don't want to kill you."

Chapter End Notes

pardon my french, i don't speak it.

Caught in the Eye

Chapter Summary

Will goes to a crime scene. Hannibal plays his game.

Will wasn't surprised that Hannibal was gone when he woke up. What was surprising was the ache that remained in his absence.

Last night, exhausted physically and emotionally, they had laid together for a long time in the dark, saying nothing. Words seemed both inadequate and treacherous. At long last Hannibal had risen to clean himself off.

Will pulled on his boxers and followed him to the bathroom, leaning against the door. He watched Hannibal examine his rear with faint stirrings of amusement as he cleaned the bite on his ass. In the light, Will could see just how bruised he was. It was very satisfying.

"Need a hand with that?" Will asked, failing to keep the teasing from his voice.

"That's quite alright." Hannibal finished cleaning the wound but didn't bandage it. "You've ruined my plans, insufferable boy," Hannibal said, though fondly.

"Your plans didn't include a mold of my teeth in your ass?"

"A minor setback."

Will raised his eyebrows "Might help if you told me your plans."

"What would be the fun in that?" Hannibal asked, washing his hands. He turned to face Will. The veil was back in place, and with it Hannibal's usual aloofness, even buck naked. Still, something curious and dark peeked out.

"Your disappearance is extraordinarily suspicious," Will pointed out. "What are we going to do?"

Hannibal's eyes shone. "Don't fret, sweet boy. Now — may I see your back?"

Will tensed. "A doctor looked at it when I was in custody. It's fine." But Hannibal stared at him insistently. Grumbling, Will stepped into the bathroom and turned around.

The marks Matthew left were now streaks of ugly scar tissue. Hannibal traced them all lightly, sending shivers to Will's toes. "It's healed poorly, but with some cream the scars will fade," Hannibal said softly, thumb sweeping down Will's spine.

Will turned, and took Hannibal's hands in his own. "You want them gone," he said. Will turned over Hannibal's forearms and traced the oddly shaped scars there. Then, he touched the puckered marks on Hannibal's shoulders, waist, thighs. From the fishing hooks. They were symmetrically placed, but unevenly shaped from the torn skin. Like starbursts. "Only our scars for each other."

"Yes," Hannibal said, bringing Will's hand up for a kiss.

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In Hannibal's absence, in the morning light, Will could believe that it was all a phantom of his imagination. There was an air of normalcy about being back in Wolf Trap with his pack, but it felt thin, and that made Will weary. He made coffee and let out the dogs for their libations, then fed them first before begrudgingly finding something for himself.

Will wasn't able to fall into his normal ease with the dogs. They had all been reunited after months apart, and when Will was in the hospital he thought he would never see them again. He was glad to see them all healthy and happy, but it felt less like coming home and more like one long goodbye. Will didn't know what would happen with himself, Abigail, and Hannibal, but bloodbath, fleeing the country, and capture were all high probabilities. Returning to his quiet life in Wolftrap seemed unlikely.

For so many years Will had basked in the goodness of his dogs, dispensing patience with them he never had for people and helping them adjust. They had been his projects, and his companions. He took them in when nobody else wanted them, and they stayed by his side when nobody wanted him. It wrenched his heart to admit it, but now they would be better served by being in someone else's care. They were all well trained at this point, so it wouldn't be impossible to find good homes for them. It was a whole project, but hell if Will was going to flee the country with his cannibal lover if his dogs didn't have good homes.

The materiality of this problem made everything seem so absurd. He was really considering running away with Hannibal and Abigail. Will didn't want to abandon his dogs, but if Hannibal told him that they had to run right now…

Will finally turned his phone back on, and was bombarded with a series of missed calls and messages — Jack, calling and leaving a curt message about jumping back into the ring; Alana checking in; even the Bureau calling about returning his belongings. Will ignored them all except for sending a text to Alana that he was still alive. Zoe curled up in his lap. "Can you believe this?" Will asked her. "Now that I'm out of the loony bin they all want to talk to me." Zoe gave a happy wag of her tail, ignorant of his troubles.

Will didn't particularly feel like getting back in touch with Jack. If there was a body Jack would send a car.

There was a body in fact, and a car came, Beverly behind the wheel. She looked miserable and spread thin. One look was all Will needed: it was the same case that she had brought to him in the BSHCI, the one with the kids.

Beverly didn't say 'please' but it was a near thing.

Will climbed into her car where the case files were waiting for him to review. There was also a box of his belongings — everything he had been wearing when he was admired to the hospital after the antler room, and his fly tying gear. "Thought you might want some of that back," Beverly said.

Will put on his glasses. He almost felt normal.

There was still only one confirmed human body, and a workshop filled with mutilated pseudo-taxidermy animals and circumstantial evidence that traced back to three more missing kids — hairs, clothing. If he buried them, they hadn't been found in the surrounding national park; if he had burned them to ash in the makeshift incinerator, he had been smart enough to do something with the teeth and bones.

Will understood why the case had gotten to Beverly. It happened occasionally in their line of work, and these kids were young, the mutilations on the girl nauseating even if they were post-mortem. Will looked over pictures of her body again, and the mountain of evidence from the kill room. Hannibal's notes were in the file, grade-A paperwork of course, cataloguing a resin soaked cat with grafted human hair and other monstrosities.

"Is Hannibal still AWOL?" Will asked.

Beverly shot him a look. "Yeah."

"Maybe he absconded with a lover," Will said dryly.

"It's damn suspicious," Beverly snapped. "Have you changed your tune?"

"Maybe I'm just tired of being everyone's canary."

"Hannibal goes missing, and just like that the Chesapeake Ripper is active."

"The Chesapeake Ripper is well hidden in plain sight," Will said, "He doesn't need to quit his day job to start his sounder."

"You were so sure before," Beverly said quietly.

"Dr. Lecter fits the profile," Will admitted. "But maybe he's not the only one."

Will spent all of the long car ride pouring over the file. By the time they reached the crime scene, Will was pretty sure he had the full picture. Sometimes it wasn't so much what they left behind as what they didn't, and this killer was reaching so desperately for what was out of reach that Will felt a low-grade panic start at the base of his skull.

They arrived at the crime scene, an unmarked strip of tall weeds between two highways, CSIs shooing crows from the carrion. Everyone parted for him, like Will Graham was inevitable, and he supposed it was — that even after suspicion and incarceration he would be drawn back to a body, a crime scene, the mark of monsters. Jack knew it. Of all of them, he wasn't the least bit surprised to see Will stalk though the yellow grass. He was pleased.

"Will!" Price exclaimed, popping up from the corpse. "Glad to have you back. Sorry about the whole thought-you-were-a-serial-killer thing."

Will shrugged. Zeller gave him an awkward smile. Will's attention was pulled down to the body.

"You know the drill," Jack called to the group. "Give him some space."

The distractions of the crime scene and all the people faded away, and Will focused in. The boy had been scalped and his eyes plucked like the other, but that wasn't all. There was a dark maw where his abdominal cavity had been hollowed out, not cleanly but desperately, and inside the bloody cavern was a doll slathered in resin, facing away from the summer sun.

I am pregnant with death.

Will went into that echo chamber where the past revealed itself, sigils on a map. The killer's sorrow and frustration pummeled him, his obsession pouring over Will like amber, encasing him. For a terrifying moment Will was stuck in it. *Don't change. Stay with me. Can you stop time?* Then the resin cracked and crumbled away.

Will stepped back into the sunlight and let everything go out of focus. He stretched his neck one way, then the other, and glanced over his shoulder at the others. "He's upset that his replacement parts don't fit," Will explained. "This isn't a serial killer so much as a deeply delusional man who is trying to keep something he's already lost."

"What did he lose?" Jack asked.

Will licked his lips. "He took a kid, years ago. The perfect child. Maybe his own. Kept them locked up and safe, tried to keep them a kid forever. They die and he can't accept it, so he starts looking for ways to preserve the body. This –" Will gestures at the corpse. "Is desperation. He doesn't know how to turn back time."

"So he's traveling around with a taxidermy kid?" Beverly asked, horrified.

"This isn't someone who is able to integrate into society," Will told Jack. "If he's on the road, he'll be noticed in the places he passes through — rest stops and trailer parks. He can't interact easily. Not to mention the smell."

Jack's eyes narrowed. "The smell?"

"He's living in a mobile home with a partially preserved body. Can't wash away that stench."

Will wondered if he had his own stench about him.

People kept distance from him at the crime scene, parting way for him like the grass around his ankles.

He noticed Jack and Beverly talking, hushed and urgent voices, and the way they glanced over at him drew him over. Beverly seemed reluctant. Jack was straightforward as usual.

“I want you on the Ripper case,” Jack said, as though Will hadn’t rebuffed him after visiting Miriam. “Beverly tells me your suspicion of Hannibal is waning.”

Will frowned. “I said that he might not be the only one to fit the profile.”

Jack walked the two of them far away from everyone else. “Anyone else in mind?” Jack pushed. “We know that the Copycat had access to information on the Hobbs and Budge case.”

“A sadist and narcissist with a medical background,” Beverly said, “Meticulous.”

Will didn’t know Hannibal’s plan, but he could feel the shape of his intentions like a phantom hovering in the periphery. A phantom in a three-piece bespoke suit.

Miriam Lass doesn’t recognize you yet, but she will.

She won’t recognize me.

Then who will she recognize?

You’ve ruined my plans, insufferable boy.

“The Chesapeake Ripper knew where Matthew was keeping me,” Will said, as though he were just putting the pieces together. “He knew what Matthew was. How did Matthew get me out of the hospital?”

“He had access to the cameras,” Beverly said.

Will’s lips twitched. Pretender to the throne. God damn it, Hannibal. “And who gave him that access?”

Jack and Beverly’s eyes went wide in tandem.

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Dr. Chilton approached his home with keys swinging around his finger, a brisk spring to his step. There was a tune half-hummed on his lips as he entered his house, all wide windows and bauhaus angles. He fell easily into his routine: keys in the bowl, unbuttoning his suit

jacket, and waltzing to the kitchen for a pre-dinner drink. There was a bottle out on the marble counter, and two glasses… two…

"Hello, Dr. Chilton," came a familiar voice from behind him.

Chilton jumped nearly out of his socks and spun around, hand over his racing heart, and gasped in surprise at the unexpected guest. "Dr. Lecter?!" Chilton exclaimed, face twisted in confusion. He almost didn't recognize the man. Hannibal Lecter was wearing unmarked hospital scrubs, and his hair was ragged about his head. "What on earth are you doing here?" Chilton asked, then, "You've been missing. You…"

There was a dark, predatory glint to Hannibal's eyes. Chilton thought that he had never seen the man smile so broadly. "It's you," he said softly. "Oh my god. It's you."

Two cars pulled up on the drive outside. Hannibal glanced out the window, pleased. "Impeccable timing," he said. "I believe that's the FBI."

Hannibal stepped forward with the grace and speed of a large cat, and grabbed Chilton's hand. Before he could process what was happening, a syringe was placed in his hand, and Hannibal maneuvered Chilton to inject him in the neck. Chilton stared as the plunger depressed into Hannibal's neck, noticing several other pinprick holes, as though Hannibal had been injected many times over. "What are you doing?" Chilton exclaimed, flinging the syringe away when his hand was released.

"You might want to run, Frederick," Hannibal said lightly, walking away from him and towards the downstairs area. There was a knock at the door.

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Will waited in the car for a moment, staring at the scene outside Dr. Chilton's house. It was swarmed with police and FBI. A team of EMTs brought a stretcher out from inside, and Will felt rather than saw who was laying on it.

Will practically jumped out of the car, and jogged over.

Hannibal looked at him bleary-eyed, and lifted the oxygen mask from his face. "Hello, Will," he said, words slurred.

"He's been sedated," one of the EMTs told Will, thinking him an FBI agent. Will could see the puncture marks on Hannibal's neck that hadn't been there last night.

"A repeat performance, Dr. Lecter?" Will asked. Hannibal's eyes, though fogged, gleamed with mirth.

Will explained to the EMTs that he needed to question Hannibal and examine him for evidence, and there was a minute of arguing over whether Hannibal needed to be taken to the

hospital immediately before the EMTs relented. After a perfunctory statement and swabbing for evidence, Will and Hannibal sat on the edge of the open ambulance, a shock blanket and spare oxygen for Hannibal.

“You like playing the victim, don’t you?” Will muttered.

“The irony is compelling,” Hannibal said, smiling behind the hovering oxygen mask.

“So when they catch Chilton, they’ll ask Miriam Lass to identify him. You too.”

“She’ll recognize the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“She said the Ripper told her he was saving her for last,” Will said. “She thought that meant he was going to come back to kill her. But now I’m not so sure.”

Hannibal’s mouth moved, as if tasting the words on his tongue. “The Ripper has retired.”

From across the scene, Jack glanced over at them. Will put his gloved hand on Hannibal’s back and leaned closer. For authenticity. For how right it felt. “There are holes in the story. Your scapegoat won’t hold forever.”

Hannibal turned to look at him. Coy, amused. Will felt lighter than he had in months, as though his feet were firmly planted in reality. No shards, no distorted reflections. Their reality, shared and seen, and so beyond the petty concerns of mortals. A shared joke, absurd and all the more hilarious because no one else got it.

“Come away with me, Will,” Hannibal purred in his ear.

Dollhouse

Chapter Summary

Will and Abigail go hunting.

Chapter Notes

just a note: this chapter contains descriptions of unusual and extreme cruelty to a kid, though it is brief and not explicit in the typical sense. just uh, a v disturbing corpse.

only a few more chapters left!! thanks for sticking around for the ride.

Will didn't wake from the nightmare in the usual way, thrusting into wakefulness with a sudden gasp, like breaking through the surface of water. He came in and out of sleep paralysis, his body asleep but his mind alert, unable to move and rouse himself. Honey poured over him, a thick dark amber, coating his body entirely — not honey, not so sweet, but resin smelling of pine, which hardened rapidly. Will was encased in a shell. Preserved. No breath, no flowing blood. He was small, smaller than he should be, shrunk inside of himself.

Hands petted through his hair. Made his eyes open. His eyes collapsed into water, and the fingers dug out his burst eyeballs and replaced them with something delicate. Will couldn't see, couldn't breathe. He was dead. He was worse than dead.

I'm not dead! Will thought with the force of screams. *I'm still here! I'm still in here!*

Will didn't know how long he spent in that paralyzed, hypnagogic place, falling fully into dark waters only to emerge encased in resin. It felt like an eon. When Will awoke, fully, he was sticky with cold sweat and wanted to tear his skin off. He pushed himself out of bed, away from the trap of sleep. For a minute he didn't know where he was, then he remembered that they had all reconvened at Hannibal's Baltimore house. On numb legs, Will left the guest bedroom and descended the stairs.

He found what he was looking for before he realized he was looking for it: the liquor cabinet in the living room. *Well, fuck me.* Will pulled out a bottle of whiskey and a crystalline glass,

and sat with his back to the cabinet and his feet cooling on the marble tiles. The drink was smooth, and Will knocked back a few glasses before he could convince himself to make a better decision. He needed to not have a body. Not his own, which ached, screams hidden in corners just waiting for his awareness to fall upon them before tearing through him; not the child's, who wasn't even given the dignity to decompose or turn to ash.
Will kept drinking past his fingers numbing and lips tingling. It was stupid, but he couldn't stop. Vaguely, he was aware of footsteps on the stairs, the approach of another. Will hung his head.

"Will?" Abigail crouched before him in her candy striped pajamas. "Hey, you in there?"

Will opened his mouth to answer, but the words didn't come out. He stared at the dark cave beneath his folded legs. Oh god, this is pathetic. He shrugged.

Gently, Abigail pried the glass from his hands and set it aside. Even in his drunken, unfocused state, her worry was a palpable weight. She took his hands in hers. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Will shook his head.

Abigail squeezed his hands. Returning blood to them. Numb hands, bound hands, hands wrapped in gauze —

"Should I get Hannibal?"

Yes. No.

"He's going to know anyway."

But Will was stuck. It was stupid — every self destructive act was an earnest attempt to push people away as much as it was a cry for help, a desire for someone to bridge that distance. Getting drunk like he didn't want Hannibal to see the resin coating his skin. Pathetic.

Hannibal was at the edge of the room. Will didn't know whether Abigail had gone to get him or if he had heard, Will didn't think he had let go of Abigail's hands and he didn't want to, ever. But Hannibal was here. Will lifted his head and looked at him, a silhouette in the dark, and for one awful moment Will thought Hannibal would turn away. Disgusted with Will's pathetic attempt to retreat, a sneer might curl Hannibal's lips, and from that would pour

venomous anger — if you are here, be here, or leave. For that moment Will thought Hannibal might not help him. *Oh, I'm not enough.*

"Will." Hannibal crouched next to Abigail and took one of Will's hands from her. His eyes were not black, fathomless pits, but searching, evaluative. A hand to Will's cheek.

I'm going catatonic, Will wanted to say, or *I'm fine and get away from them both,* because he didn't want to be a lifeless doll they took care of. All that came from his lips was a choked grunt.

Hannibal and Abigail got Will to the couch, and Abigail went to make tea. "Can you speak, Will?" Hannibal asked, sitting right next to him and still holding his hand.

Will shook his head, nearly rolling his eyes. Hannibal's hand came up to the nape of his neck and squeezed, then pulled gently at the long curls there. The sensation chased at the numbness. "Are you here with me?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded, head lolling against Hannibal's hand. He began to gently scratch his scalp. That was good — it was his hair, his scalp. Abigail came back and put a mug of tea in his hands, curling up on the other side and encouraging him to breath in the steam. Peppermint and honey. Heat to his hands — his hands.

"There, that's better than booze isn't it?" Abigail asked, gently teasing. She and Hannibal were sensitizing him, bringing his body back online with warmth and gentle sensation, chipping away at the glossy and cracked resin. For a long time Will just sat there unmoving with the warm mug in his hands, tears filling his eyes. By the time he could move enough to drink the tea, Abigail was dozing on his shoulder and Hannibal was reciting something quietly in another language.

Will drank. He tasted honey and peppermint, but still on the back of his tongue was the taste of pine and rotten flesh. Hannibal's hand still stroked gently at the back of his neck. He turned to look at Hannibal, not quite meeting his eye. Hannibal ceased his recitations and tilted Will's chin to bring them eye to eye. "It's alright if you can't speak," Hannibal said quietly.

"I'm fine." Will's voice was raspy, half-formed. Hannibal's eyes cooled. It was obvious Will wasn't.

Abigail shifted and muttered sleepily. "Come," Hannibal said, "let's back to bed."

They roused Abigail and she clung to Will all the way up the stairs. Will could really feel that he was drunk now that he was trying to walk steadily, the house sloshing around in his skull as they moved through it. At her bedroom door Abigail hugged him tightly. “Don’t be an idiot,” she said into his shoulder. “The point is we have each other now, okay?”

“Okay,” Will agreed hoarsely.

Hannibal led Will to the master bedroom, even though Will had taken the guest bedroom at the beginning of the night. Will didn’t particularly want to be alone anyway. “I think you’ll feel better after a bath,” Hannibal said easily.

Hannibal had the bath full and was prompting Will to take off his shirt when the fear hit him like a spear. “No!” Will gasped, throwing his hands up between them and backing up to the counter. “Don’t clean me.”

His heart was hammering in his chest and Hannibal looked confused and concerned. “What’s wrong?”

“Oh my god,” Will panted. Each word was wrenched out of him and the cold oozed over him. Wild-eyed, he stared at Hannibal. “I’m not your toy!”

Hannibal took the accusation in stride. Will was lashing out in response to the fear, half collapsed against the sink and trembling. “No, Will,” he said slowly. “You are not my toy.”

He approached Will slowly, and Will did not keep his hands between them, though he flinched and looked away. “The… the kid,” Will tried to explain.

Hannibal’s nostrils flared. He was in Will’s space but did not touch him, and Will could smell him, warm and familiar. “You saw the Mutilator’s work. You didn’t tell me.”

“Was a little busy escorting you out of your own crime scene,” Will snapped, still on edge.

Hannibal tentatively stroked Will’s arm with the back of his knuckles. Will’s eyes twisted shut. It didn’t feel bad, but he didn’t want to turn into a limp thing under Hannibal’s touch. “Do you know,” Will asked, eyes open, voice caustic, “what he’s doing with the parts?”

“I have an idea.”

“I saw it. He’s made a doll.”

“You are not a doll.”

Will shook his head. All their talk of reflections and seeing each other, and making each other in that image; eyes capturing demons; conversations humming in the air like so many fine threads — didn’t Hannibal understand? “I don’t want to talk about this,” Will hissed, feeling tears prick his eyes again.

Hannibal took a step back. Will couldn’t fully read him, as drunk as he was. “Would it be so terrible to let me take care of you in this way?”

Will looked at the full bath, steam gently wafting from the water’s surface. He shrugged.

Instead of drawing him to the bath, Hannibal began to strip his own clothes. Will watched his skin revealed, almost golden, the scars he had learned and the ones he had placed there. The fresh pink cut on one forearm where Matthew had cut him. Will couldn’t help but feel a tug of amusement and satisfaction when he saw the gauze on Hannibal’s right cheek. “Let me see it.”

Hannibal obliged him, and revealed the livid bite mark. Will had done that, last night. He returned a bit back to himself, and traced the swollen edge of the wound.

“A shower may be better,” Hannibal said.

Will nodded. “Alright.”

Under the hot spray, Hannibal smoothed his hands all over Will’s body, not cleaning so much as bringing his body back online. It felt good. There was no way that Will was getting it up with the deep disassociation pulling at him in waves, but the touch felt nice. Hannibal stroked down both sides of his neck, across his shoulders, down his arms to his very fingertips. Will rested his head on Hannibal’s shoulder, water washing over his face and filling between their bodies when Will wrapped his arms around him.

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Over breakfast, which was an elaborate spread, decadent and indulgent, Will chugged his coffee and picked at the food. He had barely slept, but no longer felt paralyzed.

"Abigail," Will said, finding her gaze across the table. She gave him a fond smile. Even with her hair cut short beneath her ears, she looked remarkably similar to how she was before — less nervous, not caught in the role of a victim. Maybe she hadn't changed. No. She had changed, but she was still Abigail.
Will was not so sure he could say the same about himself.

"I need your help with something," Will said, glancing quickly at Hannibal. "It might take a few days."

"Sure," Abigail said easily. "I've got your back."

Over dishes, Hannibal's hand resting on Will's shoulder. "It would be easier if you told me you plans," Hannibal repeated playfully.

Will's smile was brief. "You'll like this surprise," he said, and then, "I have to do this without you."

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"Jack," Will greeted, hands on the wheel of Abigail's car and the phone on speaker on his lap.

"Will," Jack barked. "When are you coming to the labs? We picked up Chilton on the run early this morning, and Alana is interviewing him this afternoon."

"I'm not coming in, Jack," Will said firmly.

"What?!"

Abigail raised her eyebrows as high as they would go, giving the phone a scathing look.

“Jack. I caught you the Chesapeake Ripper. Who had Hannibal in a coma for a fucking week. I’m taking a few days off.”

“Oh no you don’t,” Jack growled. “This case isn’t closed. And I need you and Doctor Lecter to come in to close it.”

“You really don’t.” Will sighed. “Hannibal needs time to recover, and I need time to figure out what Chilton planted in my head during hypnosis.”

“Will—“

“You don’t think I want the Chesapeake Ripper locked away?” Will hissed, and there was something dangerous in his tone that shut Jack up. “The Chesapeake ruined my life and our relationship. You have no idea the kind of hell I’ve been in, and I swear to god, if you don’t give me space I will sue you for all you’re worth.”

“Will, I think you—“

Will hung up. Abigail grinned at him. “Rude,” she said slowly.

“So,” Will said when they got on 81. “The thing about — all this — is that I’ve lost all of my external reference points.” He swallowed. “Some of my internal ones, if I’m being honest.”

Abigail watched him with an open face, the scar on her neck pink in the sunlight. She turned down the radio.

“I want to know if you see the same thing I do. If you’ll understand. And either way, I need your perspective.”

Abigail considered. “You want to have me around to empathize with, to have another reference point.”

Will gripped the steering wheel. “Yeah.”

“Could you be a little more blunt about what we’re doing?”

Will laughed nervously. “There’s a case. I think I can find him, and I want to do so before the FBI.”

There was a buzz of breathless energy between them. “What will you do then?” Abigail asked.

His wild hair caught the light in a halo, features suddenly hard and vicious. “Pass judgement.”

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Will was surprised at how easily Abigail adapted to their task. At the first rest stop she just observed, soaking up the sun and leaning against their car as Will’s posture changed, as he slipped in with a few truckers smoking and eating on the benches. He got them talking, looking more outgoing than Abigail had ever seen him.

She drove them to a Walmart and emerged with a bag of cheap tank tops, short shorts, sunscreen, sunglasses, lighters, and cigarettes. At a thrift store, she bought a pair of worn and brightly colored sneakers. The resulting look was nothing like the Abigail Hobbs he knew — she now looked like a working class girl, rough around the edges but still carefree. At their next stop, she tied a red bandana around her neck and handed Will a pair of flimsy aviator sunglasses.

They insinuated themselves amongst the itinerants and workers of restops and diners along 81, fishing for information: an odd man traveling alone with a wheelchair accessible mobile home. As Will drove, Abigail read the files on his phone, occasionally asking him questions. She wasn’t familiar with forensic terminology, but was smart and attentive. She would have made a good investigator.

“We should add Walmart’s to our stops in the evening,” Abigail said in their motel room the first night. She was in the bathroom rubbing balm on her sunburned shoulders, even though she had obsessively sun screened throughout the day. “You can stay parked there overnight. Night shift might have seen something.”

“Good call,” Will said from his bed.

“We could also get a mobile home. It would be easier to scout out trailer parks.”

Will watched her, and she caught his eyes in the mirror. “It's a suspicious purchase.”

She stopped fussing with her hair. “I’ve got cash.”

“Hannibal’s cash?”

Abigail tilted her head. “Yes. Is that a problem?”

Will shook his head. “No, I’m just surprised at how prepared you are. And willing.”

Abigail shrugged, and came out of the bathroom to sit on the edge of Will’s bed, her shoulders shiny and pink. “I’ve had a lot of spare time on my hands. And running errands for Hannibal has been educational.”

And you’ve been an accomplice before. Will hadn’t thought about it consciously, but maybe it wasn’t so surprising that Abigail took to this easily. They were hunting. “How did it feel when you did this with your father?” Will asked.

Abigail went stiff and cold, but didn’t look away. Will witnessed something he had seen in Hannibal before: the assessment of her own reaction, and then the decision to relax. She was not doe-eyed for long. “I wasn’t sure what was happening at first. It felt like a game. He said, ‘How do you hunt in a herd of deer? You go for the stragglers. But you look just like a deer, you could get in there and lure one away.’” Abigail smiled for a moment, apologetic. “I thought he was using a dumb metaphor to try and get me to make friends. I didn’t think that for long.

“It felt like I was watching two video feeds of my reality. In one, I knew what was really happening and was horrified. In the other, I was just making friends with some girls. It didn’t feel like lying or manipulating, it just… there were these two realities, and I was caught between them.” Abigail looked away, her eyes bright. “What my father did was awful. They didn’t deserve that. I feel guilty. I think a part of me will always feel guilty.”

Will put his hand on hers. “No one is going to force you to hunt.”

Abigail wiped a tear away and chuckled. “I don’t feel afraid, now, or horrified.” She thought for a moment, growing serious, and when she looked back at Will there was something sharp and predatory in her eyes. “I don’t feel guilty about this prey.”

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A few days later, they had an RV and a routine. Abigail’s car was tucked safely away north of Baltimore. Their new vehicle was small for a mobile home and certainly nothing luxurious. It was used, smelling faintly of mildew and cigarettes, and the plastic was peeling away from the counters, but it served their purposes. Abigail had a map of sites to hit: trailer parks, cheap camping spots, and the rest stops in between.

Hannibal didn’t call. Will thought of Matthew Brown’s body, folded up into the freezer with his severed hands in a bouquet of flowers in his chest. He thought of the resin-soaked doll, placed inside the last victim body, face turned away. Both were mutilated bodies, and yet, they were astonishingly different in their purpose. One was a gift, the other was desperation.

Will was sure that their prey was deranged, and neurodivergent to the point of not being able to function in society. How he hadn’t been caught yet was astounding. He was in control of his actions, and not unintelligent, but certainly the kind of criminal that would end up in the BSHCI. Maybe the killer deserved treatment and help. But Will could think of something else he deserved.

Will had never driven so much in his life. The long stretches of road gave him and Abigail the opportunity to really talk. They tried to map out what each other had missed during the time Will thought she was dead. It was difficult, more so for Will than Abigail — she had been able to acclimate with Hannibal. Will’s sentences got short and choppy and choked out entirely when the conversation veered too close to the broken edges inside.

“Do you hate him?” Abigail asked. She was so accepting of everything Will said, it made him dizzy.

Will grit his teeth, watching the strip of highway disappear under their RV. “Yes. No. It always turns into self-hatred.”

“I promise I won’t say something cheesy about loving yourself.”

Will let out a breathy laugh. He glanced at her. It still struck him sideways that she was alive and here and knew everything. Someone besides Hannibal shared in their reality. “I thought, ultimately, that I was a good person. I thought I could be that. I tried so long to not be the monsters I caught.”

Abigail gave him a wry smile. “Still hung up on the whole morality thing?”

“It’s all I had to hold onto.”

“We’re not like them though, are we?” She smiled. “We’re a different breed of monster.”

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After five days, they finally caught the scent.
It was at a biker bar, of all places. Not the kind of spot their prey would go to, but when Will saw the pack of bikes outside he felt a tug. Inside, Will ordered a beer and burgers for himself and Abigail. He kept an eye on her as she peeled off to chat with the smokers outside.

“That your girl?” a gruff voice asked from beside him. Will turned to look at the man who had sidled up to him at the bar — an older guy, barrel chested with a beard streaked with grey and old riding leathers.

“That’s my kid,” Will said sharply.

The man grunted in acknowledgment. “Best keep an eye on her.”

Will looked him up and down, but didn’t get a threatening vibe from him. “She can take care of herself. Kids?”

Another grunt, a sip of his beer. “Two grown.”

“That happens fast.” Will looked out the windows, where Abigail was chatting and smoking with two guys, also part of the biker pack.

Will and the man drank together in companionable silence for a while. He was familiar with these kind of people; he had meant plenty of them on dockyards in his youth. His father’s friends. His father. The barback set down two greasy plates next to Will and shortly after, Abigail came back, going straight for the fries. Will gave her a smile and ruffled her short hair, and she swatted his hand away.

“That your RV outside?” the man asked.
Will nodded. “Yup. Been on the road about a week.”

“Where ya headed?”

Will and Abigail exchanged a look. “We’re looking for his cousin,” she said, frowning.

Will grimaced. “Yeah. I think he’s in some trouble.” Will nodded out to the lot. “He lives out of his. Been a bitch trying to track him down.”

The man wiped the foam from his beard and considered them both. “Got a picture?”

“Nothing recent,” Will said. “His RV is wheelchair accessible. If you’ve seen him, you’d know. He’s kind of…” Will gestured vaguely at his own head. “Loose, up there.”

“Dad,” Abigail said sharply.

“It’s true! He was always that way. I don’t even know if he can take care of himself, last time I saw him he stunk like nothing else.” Will shook his head, turned to their companion. “Kind of a creep. But, you know, family.”

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The scent sharpened, metallic in the air, like adrenaline and blood and the sky before lightning struck.

The trailer park was blue in the young summer night, yellow lamps illuminating the maze of vehicles, RVs and air streams and campers, most of them glowing gold from the inside. People hung outside in folding chairs, smoking and drinking. A dog barked. A fire was going in one of the pits. The dark deepened, and blue turned to black. Their prey was here. As soon as they drove into the park, they knew, drawn like moths to light to the old RV parked at one far end of the lot. Death seeped from the vehicle like an oil spill, thick as tar and smelling of pine and rot.

The feeling was addicting. Will couldn't eat. He felt dangerous. The broken shards were finally slotting together, each piece lining up. Will wanted to see. And he wanted to be seen. Abigail sharpened like a knife. All of her movements were exact. Without a word, they both dressed in the black clothes Abigail had bought them and donned gloves. She had her hunting knife at her hip. Will was unarmed. They watched through the curtains, and waited.

At long last, a man came out of the RV. The light inside was dim, and his features were lost in shadow. Will and Abigail slipped silently outside, and began to circle. Their prey took a bucket to the water pump. Abigail followed him, and Will went for the vehicle. It was locked and he couldn't see through the windows, but the smell was unmistakable. Death and desperation and pine.

Will flattened against the back of the RV in the dark, listening as the man came back, water sloshing heavily in the bucket. The lock on the door clicked, and then Abigail was walking up. "Excuse me?" Will heard her say. "Have you seen a russel terrier? She just ran off this way." The door creaked open. "Hey, did you hear me?"

Will rounded the corner, catching sight of the man's face for the first time as he looked uneasily at Abigail. He was white, his age disguised under a thick and wiry beard, rough-skinned and thickly built. "Go away," he said hoarsely, almost timid.

"Did you see my dog or not?" Abigail demanded, hand on her hip (over her knife, Will knew).

"I said go away," the man repeated, and stepped into the mobile home.

Will sprinted forward and caught the door on his arm before it could close, and the smell was overpowering. Their prey spun and stared at Will with shocked eyes. "You're not supposed to be in here!" he cried as Will forced his way in.

In a second, Will took in the scene around him. Then he pounced. He pinned the man to the wall with his forearm over his neck, choking. The man thrashed and clawed at Will's face, then they were tumbling through the vehicle. He was naturally strong but no fighter, and Will was deadly calm, even as he took blows. And the man was afraid.

Will got him in another choke hold, this time with both arms, the man's back to his chest. Abigail was poised with her knife drawn, looking for her opening. Will shook his head at her, tightening his grip as the man clawed his arms. He could feel his heart pumping as blood failed to reach his brain, and then he started going limp.

Will dropped the man to the floor with a heavy thud. That wasn't how he wanted to kill him. His body was tingling all over, like he was made of energy, like the tar and resin and chrysalis had all fallen away. Abigail was panting, eyes wide but not afraid. She felt it too. Her eyes went from the figure on the ground, and then snapped to something over Will's shoulder. Her features went slack. "Oh my god."

Will turned, and looked.

The body looked inhuman. It was impossible to determine by sight how long he had been dead — months, probably. Before the first girl showed up. The body was partially preserved in amber resin, sitting in a hospital wheelchair, wearing boy's shorts and a superman shirt. The clothes were too small. The body was emaciated, long before death, and his feet were bound and stuffed into kid sneakers. Hair, eyes, fingers, and some patches of skin had been replaced. His wrists were scarred from years of restraints.

You didn't want him to grow up, Will thought, maybe aloud. Anger burned white hot in his chest. *You kept him for years and years. Forced him into your own image. Kept him from changing.*

Abigail and Will stood over their prey, angels of judgment dressed in black, vibrating and in synch. It was the last thing the Mutilator saw before they tore him to pieces.

This is our design.

Beloved

Chapter Summary

Hannibal had never seen something so beautiful.

Chapter Notes

hey, look: more smut! c:

I think the next chapter is the last. which is insane. it's been a wild ride. thank you so much for reading and commenting -- even if you've never commented but you've gotten this far, you have my thanks. as always, you can find me on tumblr!

note: Will is dommy again here.

Hannibal did not think he had seen anything more beautiful in his life.

And he had spent his whole life in search of and admiration for beauty. Art, architecture, opera, violence. Hannibal was a connossoir of beauty. But true awe did not always come from expected places.

Abigail and Will stood in his backyard, having snuck around the back in the dead of night. They were more vibrant in their color for their week-long absence, Will dressed in his usual worn flannel, and Abigail in a thin-strapped sundress, scar open to the night. They held hands, and Will carried a portable cooler in the other. Both of them were radiant with a psychotic, transcendent aura. The traces Hannibal had scented on each of them before were now in full bloom.

The three drew together like magnets. Hannibal ran his hand through Abigail's hair fondly, and she breathed a laugh of relief, swinging her arm around Hannibal. Will's eyes boored into him, dark and shattering as Hannibal gripped his arm. They were close enough to kiss, but this gaze was so much better. Hannibal smiled, slow, like the inevitable dawn, and it caught Will's breath.

"I need to show you," Will said, nearly trembling.

Hannibal welcomed them in to the dining room, his chest tight. Will placed the cooler at the head of the table, and stepped aside, Abigail to the other, both looking at Hannibal expectantly. "You've brought me a gift," Hannibal said. He tried to keep his voice calm. He

felt the swell of a crescendo, the culmination of a movement, and his eyes filled with unshed tears.

His family was here. A teacup had come back together.

Hannibal opened the cooler. Inside was the severed head of who he assumed was the Mutilator. The head was completely skinned and the eyes had been removed; then it had been treated with a glossy coating of resin, so smooth that Hannibal could see his reflection against the pattern of muscle beneath. The orbital cavities and mouth were stuffed with wild flowers.

“We didn’t want to honor him,” Abigail explained. “And it would be too suspicious to take an organ.”

Hannibal reached out, and brushed a fingernail against the flowers. He never thought that his charges would kill without him, not yet. “It’s beautiful,” he whispered.

“I wanted to do it without you,” Will confessed, stepping closer to Hannibal. “I didn’t know if I really wanted to, or if it was just what you wanted for me. Then — I knew you had to see it.”

Hannibal wrenched his gaze from the severed and skinned head, and looked at his beloved. “I do see.”

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Will stayed next to Abigail’s bed until she fell asleep, holding her hand, and long after that. Hannibal watched them for several minutes by the doorway, commuting the sight to memory: Will’s hand above her head on the pillow from where he had been stroking her hair, the way she was curled towards him and tucked sweetly beneath the covers. Hannibal walked to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. “It’s very late,” Hannibal whispered.

Will looked up with damp eyes. His addam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed, reluctant to leave her side. He nodded, and gave her one last look.

“I don’t know if we’re doing right by her,” Will said once out in the hall, voice raw with emotion. “She’s been so accepting of all of this. She *trusts* us. What if we--" He couldn’t finish the sentence.

Hannibal took his face in both hands, and stroked his cheeks. Will shuddered and leaned into the touch, holding Hannibal’s waist like an anchor. “She is our family, Will. Our bonds cannot be severed. Our family had the unique capacity not just to hurt us, but to heal us.”

Will whimpered softly, leaning completely into Hannibal’s touch. Hannibal could feel the tension in him again, and his exhaustion. He tilted Will’s chin to raise his eyes. “Darling boy,” Hannibal breathed. “Even now, you struggle with yourself.”

“She didn’t choose this,” Will said. “Not like we did.”

Hannibal brushed their foreheads together. “We can only do our best, as her fathers.”

Will wrapped his arms fully around Hannibal and tucked his head in his neck, breathing deep. Hannibal held him for a moment, before drawing away and leading Will down the hall. As they walked, he could feel Will’s aura grow again, and once they were inside Hannibal’s bedroom, he found Will’s eyes blown wide. Hannibal smirked and took a few steps backwards, goading Will to prowl. “Tell me, Will,” Hannibal purred, “how did it feel to kill him?”

Will grabbed Hannibal’s shirt and crushed their mouths together. He was a force of nature, pushing past Hannibal’s lips and pulling them together like casualties tangled in the tides. Hannibal felt himself open so easily: lips devoured by Will’s snarling teeth, mouth open to his tongue, pushed until he was forced to sit on the chaise at the end of the bed. Will bent above him, too engrossed in the kiss to do anything but hold Hannibal’s head in place.

“It felt good,” Will growled, hips rolling forward. Hannibal eased his shirt out of his pants and felt the smooth skin over his hips. “Better than killing Matthew. Than Hobbs.” Will gripped Hannibal’s hair, the sensation eliciting a groan. Hannibal went for the button of his pants, feeling the hot bulge beneath, and Will rolled his hips forward again. “I saw him. I could see into the back of his skull, down to his bones. And I wanted to strip his skin away. I showed him what he couldn’t see of himself. I. Delivered. My. Judgement.”

Hannibal stared up at his face. Beautiful — mouth slack with arousal and power, eyes dark and piercing. Hannibal rubbed Will’s cock over his boxers. “What you are becoming is not a product of myself,” Hannibal said as Will rubbed into his palm, “But a beast of your own nature. I could whisper through the chrysalis, but I could not predict or design what would emerge.”

“I know,” Will gasped, tugging Hannibal’s hair again. “Hands on your knees. Don’t move.”

Hannibal obliged, and for a few moments Will just cradled his skull and breathed. “He kept the child for years,” Will said in an aching voice, “and when the kid started growing up, he bound his hands and feet and starved him to keep him small.” Will trembled, his erection flagging. “You broke me down. You set me against my worst fears. But I’m not a specimen for you to pin.”

“No, Will,” Hannibal breathed, in awe.

“You didn’t lie to me, not really.” Tears slipped down his cheeks. “Before — that wasn’t a trick. That was you.”

“I only ever deceived you so that I might show you myself,” Hannibal said, “and show you yourself.”

Will whimpered and bent to kiss him wetly. Hannibal kept himself still, but kissed back as good as he got, rough and desperate.

“Clothes off,” Will commanded in a rough voice. “On the bed.”

Hannibal complied. He was more than willing to cede control of the situation to Will, especially when he was like this -- godlike and terrible, Hannibal a worshiper at his feet. The attention Will gave him as he stripped was beyond sexual. “How do you want me?” Hannibal asked, once his clothes were folded and put aside.

Will had stepped out of all his clothes as well, stroking his cock as he watched Hannibal obey his orders. “On your back. Hands above your head.” As Hannibal got into position, Will slid out the chest from under the bed. Luckily, Hannibal still kept his toys in the same place.

“Is that for you or me?” Hannibal asked, eyeing the length of red rope in Will’s hands.

“Mostly for me,” Will admitted. He straddled Hannibal, sitting on his cock, and tied Hannibal’s wrists together. He was careful not to make it too tight, and tied it to the anchor point tucked against the headboard. He saw the discomfort Hannibal was trying to breathe through. “My aim is not permanent damage,” Will said clearly, cupping his face.

“What is your aim?” Hannibal asked.

Will lifted himself up to hands and knees, making Hannibal groan and swivel his hips at the lack of contact. He crawled his way down Hannibal’s body, eyes burning, until he was between his legs, hovering over his cock. With just his thumb, Will traced up the underside of Hannibal’s erection, feeling the foreskin slide at the head, and down all the way over his balls and to his dark, tight hole. Hannibal watched curiously.

“When you were tied up,” Will began to say, teasing Hannibal with his fingers, “I wanted to fuck you. I wanted to take what you were saving while you knew I hated you. I wanted it to hurt.”

Hannibal groaned, head falling back for a moment. “I would have accepted that, too.”

“I wouldn’t,” Will hissed. Then he bent down and took Hannibal in his mouth.

Will wanted Hannibal writhing. He sucked him down hard, tongue working to get his cock as wet as possible, a familiar, throbbing length in his mouth. It felt like a lifetime ago when he last had Hannibal like this. Hannibal was mostly still and quiet, the heavy drag of his breath the only indication of his mounting pleasure. Will rested his forearms on Hannibal’s thighs, hands squeezing his hips, keeping him immobile. He forced a hiss from Hannibal, rubbing his tongue back and forth on the wrinkled foreskin, running the tip of his tongue up the slit; forced out a bead of precome; took him suddenly to the back of his throat and gagged. Will thought of drowning Hannibal with the hose and groaned, choked.

The wet sound of Hannibal’s cock slipping from his mouth and slapping back against his skin shot down Will’s spine. He lay on his stomach and pushed Hannibal’s thighs up, exposing him completely. Hannibal moaned his name.

Will traced down his balls with tongue and lips, the raised line of skin down his perenium, and Hannibal wasn’t so quiet anymore. There was a growl at the edge of his breathing, moans

clipped and bitten off. Hannibal hadn't allowed this before either and it was more devastating than penetrative sex. Will licked over and over again at his hole, dark skin, so fucking tight; and Will was tasting him, eating him out. When the slick skin began to give, Will pointing his tongue and pushed it inside.

Hannibal cried out. The ropes tugged against the anchor point. "Will," Hannibal moaned, trying to roll his hips. "Please, beloved."

Will nipped at his rim. From his nose to his chin he was damp with saliva and smelled so strongly of Hannibal, his cock, his ass, his obsidian soul. Will swirled his tongue and speared Hannibal open, fucking him open with his mouth. Hannibal's legs trembled around him.

"Beg me," Will snarled. He shifted backwards and spread Hannibal's cheeks apart to stare at his hole, barely stretched from his tongue. The bruises on his ass had faded, but the bite mark was still healing, pink with fresh scar tissue.

"Please, Will," Hannibal said, staring down his body at him. His eyes were lidded and dark, hungry but not starving. "I want to feel you inside of me."

Will sat up on heels and took his cock in hand, stroking it a few times to relieve the maddening pressure of his arousal. "That's not begging," he said.

Hannibal's lip curled, just for a moment. He wasn't nearly desperate enough for it. "Do you know how long I've waited," Hannibal said, words nearly lost in the blend of his accent and arousal. "To behold you like this? For you to kill, not in self defense or fear?"

Will crawled up and straddled his chest, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Not so long, really," Will said. He began to stroke himself again, inches from Hannibal's face. He lifted his head and his tongue darted out, but Will kept himself just out of reach.

"My whole life, cruel boy," Hannibal growled, straining at the ropes. "You were born for me."

Will took his own pleasure in his fist, staring down at Hannibal bound beneath him. Will placed his free hand on Hannibal's neck. "Oh, god," Will groaned. He couldn't help it. He squeezed Hannibal's neck, cutting off the blood to his head.

Hannibal's mouth went fully slack. His cheeks shined red. He held Will's eyes as he was choked and Will pumped his fist furiously. "I wanted to kill you," Will breathed, and Hannibal's eyes rolled.

That moment where his composure broke brought Will right to the edge. He released his cock and choked Hannibal with both hands, rocking on him. "I wanted to feel your life flutter out in my hands," Will said in a trembling voice. "I wanted to spill your blood."

Hannibal struggled to meet Will's eyes, the lack of blood to his brain dragging at his consciousness. "Please," Hannibal mouthed.

Will hushed him, watching carefully for the moment he blacked out.

Hannibal's eyes fluttered again — rolled — shut. Will released his neck slowly, and felt his breath on the back of his hand. Hannibal was completely lax beneath him.

Will took a moment to collect himself. His heart was racing in his chest, he was fucking harder than he had ever been in his life and dizzy with it.

He needed Hannibal broken and helpless in the palm of his hand. He hadn't been, tied up in the shed for days without food or water, not in the antler room, not begging for Will's cock in his ass and getting his teeth instead. Maybe Hannibal didn't break. Maybe his surrender looked different than Will's.

Will crawled off Hannibal and fished out the lube from the bedside table. He settled back between his legs, watching the unconscious rise and fall of his chest, thick hair damp with sweat. Will slicked his fingers up and rubbed Hannibal's hole. His breath caught in his chest as he pressed inside. The way Hannibal was totally unresponsive, at his mercy, as Will felt his tight heat — it was intoxicating. Insane. Hannibal's ass barely gave around him.

Hannibal came to with Will three fingers deep inside him, disoriented and teary-eyed. "Will," he croaked, and made to reach for him, the rope around his wrists holding him back. Hannibal tugged once in confusion and then whimpered, a needy sound Will hadn't heard from him before, and so disarming in its honest that Will gaped up at him.

"I'm here," Will said. Hannibal clenched around Will's fingers like he was trying to suck him into his body. A tear slipped down Hannibal's cheek, and his turned his face into his arm. "Did you think I would leave you?" Will asked.

"Wouldn't you?" Hannibal's voice was rough. "Is that not your revenge?"

Like he had left him in the shed. Like Hannibal had feared this past week, that he and Abigail would slip away. Will groaned and bent over, kissing his soft belly, his ribs, his chest. "I'm not," Will said. "I won't. Hannibal, I'm here."

Hannibal looked down at him. Will could feel his heartbeat thud around his fingers. "Please, Will," he said, and this time it really sounded like begging.

Will cursed under his breath and drew back, slipping his fingers out of Hannibal, the wet sound coupled with a lewd groan from both of them. He could barely get the lube on his cock, his hands were shaking so bad. "I'm going to fuck you now," Will said, voice laced with awe; and Hannibal yanked at his restraints with a snarl, wrapping his legs around Will like he couldn't get him in fast enough; and Will couldn't decide whether to look at his face or his entrance as he pushed up to it; and then he was sinking in, so fucking hot and slick, and suddenly Hannibal was everywhere.

Will froze up, but Hannibal didn't give him a chance. Heels on his ass, Hannibal pulled Will inside him to the hilt, and they both stared at each other in shock. *I killed three men for this,* Will though, followed quickly by *I love you* , and then he couldn't do anything except move.

Will fucked him hard and inelegantly. He couldn't stop even if he wanted to, because every drag of Hannibal's ass around his cock as he drew back absolutely demanded that he thrust

back in. From the sounds Hannibal made and the way he leveraged as much as he could to meet each thrust, Hannibal had no complaints. Will bent Hannibal's knees to his chest, practically folding him in half, and Hannibal started falling apart. It was hellfire. Will was sure he was sweating off his skin. "Fuck, Hannibal!"

They slapped together, and the jolt from that deep pressure pulled at his groin, white hot, making him gasp and pant. It was almost painfully intense but Will couldn't slow down. He felt feral, and for a moment saw them both on the forest floor, ink-black and monstrous, rending into each other. Fuck. Will tried to be here, in reality, but it was difficult. He focused on the shape of Hannibal's mouth as he moaned and snarled his pleasure, sweaty flushed skink, the faint bruises rising on his neck, the angle of his jaw as he tilted his head back in near agony. Will's mind was wiped out like a basalt flood.

Hannibal started coming and the veins in his arms stood out as he strained on the ropes, white scars bright against his flushed skin, face blissed out and tormented and so fucking beautiful; Will fucked him brutally and the wash of heat in his groin didn't seem to end, as intense as an orgasm but he was still hard, he couldn't come, he needed to come, "Fuck, Hannibal, please baby."

Will slowed his pace, then drew out of Hannibal to the tip. He was still rock hard but trembling all over like he had aftershocks. Will whimpered and pulled out.

"Untie me," Hannibal panted, but Will was already going for the knots. They were both a mess of sweat and sloppy need. When Will got the knots loose Hannibal yanked his hands free impatiently, and rolled Will into his arms so they were both on their sides, clinging to each other, kissing desperately.

"Please, please, jesus christ!" Will keened, nearly lost between their mouths. Hannibal sucked on two of his own fingers and Will buried his face in his neck, sobbing. "I need to come, fuck!"

Hannibal lifted one of Will's legs over his hip and traced the cleft of his ass, fingers firmly rubbing around his hole. Will felt out of his mind, uncomfortably hard and crying into Hannibal's skin. "My darling boy," Hannibal cooed to him. "My beloved. I need you."

His fingers slipped inside and found Will's prostate, pressing on both sides and then stroking steadily. "I can't, I can't," Will gasped, leaking where his cockhead rubbed against Hannibal.

"Yes you can, Will, let me help you." Hannibal kissed down his neck, lapping up the sweat. "Come on me."

Will groaned and kissed him deeply; Hannibal bit his lip to bleeding and stroked hard on his prostate, and that was it, Will was coming so long and hard that everything went black.

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Will must have been out for a little while, because when he came to he was cleaned up and tucked under the covers, the lights were off, and Hannibal was staring at him from a few inches away. He blinked slowly, as languid as a large cat in the shade, and so obviously happy that Will couldn't help but smile.

"Well, that nearly killed me," Will muttered.

Hannibal slipped his hands under the covers and stroked Will's flank. "It was intense," he agreed.

"It's always intense with you," Will grumbled. Maroon eyes held the image of him lovingly. Will didn't know how to say it. Instead, he confessed: "I don't know if I can want the things I did before. I don't even know if I can have sex with you while you're not restrained."

"We have time," Hannibal said, hands warm and soothing. "To relearn each other."

As We Are

Chapter Summary

It's time for Will, Hannibal, and Abigail to leave.

Chapter Notes

this is the last chapter of this fic series. and its quite long!

I have a whole long note at the end, but for now, thank you so much for reading. (only warnings are Will having some PTSD feelings.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke slowly and easily from a deep, long rest. He felt cocooned and warm, and for a while was unwilling to wake up fully. It felt nice. He hadn't felt like this in a long time.

After months of sleeping on mattresses in confinement, with only a few drunken nights in his own home and then on the road, the familiar comfort of this bed was a blessing.

This bed.

Will blinked and came awake suddenly. Hannibal was laying in front of him, watching him with calm amber eyes. Will swallowed against his shock and a spike of anxiety. Hannibal saw him startle, and reached out to stroke his cheek. The pressure of his fingers on Will's jaw and around his ear was strange, both comforting and utterly surreal. "Good morning, Will," Hannibal said, gentle and fond.

For a moment, Will wasn't sure what reality he was in. The absurd events that led them here came back to him, falling into place like broken glass in reverse. "Is this real?" he asked.

The lids of Hannibal's eyes lowered, amused. "Yes, my darling. A long and winding path with many strange turns, to bring us here."

"Not back where we started."

"No. Much more than that."

Will sat up, and Hannibal retracted his hand with a lingering touch. Will stretched his neck side to side, and glanced over at the clock. It was late for Hannibal to still be in bed -- he wanted to wait until Will woke up. Didn't want him to wake up alone and doubt for one

minute that Hannibal wasn't here with him. *After everything I did to him,* Will thought, his chest tight, *And everything he did to me.*

Will sat on the edge of the bed, his back to Hannibal and looked down at himself, trying to feel that this was real. He was naked from last night, and the memory of having sex with Hannibal slid warm down his spine. "I'm going to shower," he said without looking back, a bit surprised that he felt steady on his feet when he rose.

Hannibal watched him walk to the bathroom and close the door behind him.

Will turned on the shower and felt it grow warm instantly, the high pressure tingling the skin of his hand. He stepped in and let that sensation roll over his whole body, the sound of water against tile filling him up. His body was deeply sore, and it felt like he was becoming aware of it for the first time in eons. In order to survive, he had existed entirely in his mind, numb to his body and all it endured.

Will heard the bathroom door open and Hannibal's light footsteps. The shower door opened, letting out out steam as Hannibal stood in the threshold. Will didn't turn to him, but felt his eyes rake over his back, water dripping down in torrents. Though all bruises had long faded, his back was marred in a terrain of fresh scar tissue. Will heard Hannibal sigh deeply, and then finally the shower door closed and Hannibal stepped up behind him.

Will's skin tingled where Hannibal touched him, lightly tracing the scars, skin smooth with water. "You hate them," Will said.

"I lament that I was unable to take care of you, when you were so rudely hurt by another." His voice was thick.

"Well. Your hands were tied," Will joked.

He heard Hannibal's jaw click over the rush of water. "You did not allow me to care for you."

Will's heart seized in his chest. There it was — that longing. He turned around, and Hannibal's eyes were raw and vulnerable. He ached for Will. Will touched his neck, and Hannibal arched into his hand, a small needy sigh passing through his lips. "For so long I fantasized about being vulnerable before you," Will said, stroking his jaw. Hannibal's eyes snapped open — understanding. "Being hurt, so that you would see me. And… care for me." He swallowed, throat tight. "You have no idea, how much it hurt."

Hannibal stepped forward and held Will, hands secure on his lower back. "Tell me," Hannibal breathed, more a plea than a command. "What did he do to you?"

Will chuckled darkly, eyes stinging. He turned and pulled Hannibal in the spray with him, wrapping his arms around his neck. "You saw how he kept me," Will said, staring down at Hannibal's collar where water pooled and slipped over bone. "When he still thought we could be friends he just locked me in, with the chains around my ankles. Fed me, gave me water, tended to my injuries."

"Injuries?"

Will looked up. “The guard thought I had… done what Hannah did to Matthew. Beat me pretty bad before Matthew pulled him off.” Will touched his own face, remembering how swollen it had been. “The bruises were his.” His hand trailed down to his neck, and he glanced away.

Hannibal tilted Will’s head back with a touch to his jaw, his unblinking attention on Will -- and it all came tumbling out. “Matthew got angry, and choked me,” Will said. “I thought he was going to kill me. But he didn’t. I tried to escape. I should have killed him while I had the chance, but I didn’t. I ran. And he shot me with one of those fucking darts.”

Hannibal pulled him as close as he could while still holding eye contact, water collecting where their bodies pressed together, warm and wet and secure. Will’s heart was hammering in his chest, anxiety ringing through his skull. “He… bathed me,” Will whispered, nails digging in to Hannibal’s shoulders.

Hannibal growled in anger. Will’s eyes were hot, blurring with tears. The words trembled from his lips. “I was paralyzed. And he cleaned me. T-took care of me. He said he didn’t want to hurt me, said I needed it, that I was a masochist and was -- was.” Will closed his eyes, and his tears mingled with the spray from the shower. “I *did.* In the hospital, I asked him to hurt me. I needed it. I needed to break on the outside. A-after you and Alana came, and I told you to get out, Matthew took his keys and opened up my back.” Will shuddered, and started to shake softly. “I did ask for it.”

“Will --”

Will shook his head vigorously. “No. You don’t need to say it.”

“I want you to hear it,” Hannibal insisted. “From me.”

Will closed his eyes tightly.

“What Matthew did to you is not your fault,” Hannibal said firmly. “You did not ask for it, nor deserve it, nor was he taking care of you.”

“He beat me with a metal rod. He wouldn’t stop, not when I begged him, not when I vomited from the pain.” His teeth were chattering, he couldn’t open his eyes and his legs felt weak. “I don’t -- I don’t remember when he stopped, I don’t know what he did to me. *I don’t remember.* ”

Will fell apart and Hannibal held him tight against his chest. Will sucked in short breaths, sobbing and twitching, floating outside of himself as he crumbled. He was looking at himself from a vast distance, wind and water howling through the wasteland of his mind. The earth cracked and the sky tore open, and Hannibal held him. “Hush, my dear boy. He cannot hurt you again. You are safe, and whole, and here with me, and I will never allow this to happen again. Breathe, Will. Can you breathe for me?”

Hannibal backed Will into the corner of the shower and held him safely in that enclosed space. He pulled Will’s head into his chest, so he couldn’t see or feel anything but Hannibal and the warm spray of water. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Will heard himself say.

“Never apologize to me, Will. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

Will whimpered, and tried to breathe. It felt like Hannibal had his ribs cracked open and was cradling his heart. Like he could wrench it out or just feel it beat in his hands. “It still hurts. I can still feel it all over my back, and arms, and…” Will went still. His heart was in his throat. “You didn’t save me.” Hannibal tensed all around him. “I wanted you to come through that door and see him beating me and tear him to pieces, and you didn’t, you didn’t find me, you didn’t stop him, you didn’t protect me -- you promised you wouldn’t leave me in an institution and you put me in there with him, I was there because of you! I went mad because of you! You made me think I had tried to kill you.”

Will couldn’t tell if it was just him shaking, or if Hannibal was as well, but he could breathe again. He looked up at Hannibal and saw the clench of his jaw and sorrow in his eyes. “These scars are yours,” Will hissed. “This hurt is yours. What are you going to do about it?”

Hannibal’s eyes went wide. He shifted Will over so his back was against the tiled wall and took a small step back, hands on Will’s waist, staring down at his body and thinking rapidly.

And then he went to his knees.

Hannibal traced the scar on Will’s left inner thigh and looked up at him. Water ran down his face. “Give them to me,” he said, voice rough. “Your hurt, your scars. Carve them upon me to carry. Let me worship them. Let me pay penance for the rest of our days, let me care for you.”

Will’s chest heaved, unable to speak or look away. Still looking up, Hannibal placed a kiss on the scar, and his tongue flicked out to taste the raised skin. “You’d hurt me again,” Will said quietly, “if it meant keeping me.”

Hannibal turned his face into Will’s inner thigh and breathed deeply, a pained look on his face. “I came so close to losing you before. I don’t have it in me to let you go.”

“How did you feel when you watched me stab myself?” Will asked.

Hannibal’s brow pinched. He stroked the back of Will’s thighs, and Will tilted Hannibal’s chin up so he could see him as he answered. “Afraid. Not just of losing you, but of my need for you.”

“It’s rather inconvenient, isn’t it?”

Hannibal smiled up at him. “Extremely. There is nothing I would not do for you.”

“Or endure for me.”

Hannibal nodded. He lifted his hands up in offering, and Will took them. “I would let you cripple me,” Hannibal said. “If that is the proof you need of my devotion, take them from me. Please, Will. Take everything I have.”

Will shuddered. Hannibal’s words shook through him like a seismic event. Will squeezed his hands gently and brought them to his mouth, kissing the pad of each finger. Will lowered

himself to the floor of the shower with Hannibal, unable to stop kissing his hands. *They're mine,* Will thought, sliding two of Hannibal's fingers into the warmth of his mouth and holding him there, cradling Hannibal in his jaws. Hannibal tilted his head back with a reverent breath, exposing the thick chords of his neck.

"Thank you," Hannibal whispered, and it sounded like *I love you.*

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[Two weeks later.]

The doorbell rang around 1PM on a lovely Saturday. Hannibal waited until Abigail had retreated upstairs and then answered the door to discover Alana Bloom, looking stunning in a red printed wrap dress. "Alana," he greeted with a warm smile, "What a pleasant surprise. Would you like to come in?"

She returned a smile, though her hand fidgeted on the strap of her purse. "Good afternoon, Hannibal. I was actually —" The sound of scampering paws interrupted her. "Oh hi guys!" Alana bent and held out her hand to Winston and Buster, who wagged their tails vigorously. Alana glanced up, her smile more free. "Well that answers my question. I was wondering if Will was here."

"He is," Hannibal confirmed, then called back into the house, "Darling? Alana Bloom is here." Of course, he knew that Will was already listening in.

Will entered the foyer. His hair was trimmed neatly, and he wore dark trousers and a blue shirt, open a few buttons. He still looked thin from his time in the institution, but besides that remarkably improved. He gave her a brief smile. "Hello, Alana."

"It's good to see you, Will. I was wondering if you would join me for a coffee."

Will looked at Hannibal for a moment, who was already stepping aside to disentangle himself politely. "Sure, why not." Will looked back at Alana, and she was surprised that he maintained eye contact. It was a little eerie. "I have to be back by three."

"I know a place nearby," Alana said. Will grabbed his wallet and keys from a side table, and Hannibal gave them both a nod. "It was nice to see you, Hannibal."

"And you. We'll have to have you for dinner sometime soon."

Will's lips twitched.

“So you’ve moved in together?” Alana asked as they walked to the coffee shop.

Will shrugged. “Sort of. Sometimes we’re in Wolftrap. He’s helping me find homes for the dogs.”

Alana gave him a shocked look. “Really?”

“Yeah. So, if you want any of them…”

“I’m surprised.”

Will rubbed the back of his neck and moved a little further from her on the sidewalk. “Yeah, well. I’m keeping Winston. And Hannibal’s grown quite fond of Zoe, though he won’t admit it.”

“Do the dogs not fit in Hannibal’s home?”

Will shot her a hard look. “Is that what this is about?”

Alana faltered for a moment. Luckily, they arrived at the coffee shop. After they were sitting down with their drinks, Will was relaxed again. He looked quite handsome, not just the hair and clothes, but the fact that he looked well and confident. It was a version of Will that Alana wasn’t used to seeing.

“I hated abandoning the dogs,” Will said. “I’m grateful that you took care of them. But if you hadn’t been around, they could have ended up in a bad place. After everything that happened, I don’t feel able to take care of them all.”

“Are you worried that something is going to happen?” she asked.

Will shrugged. “I’ve giving up assuming I know what life will throw me.”

Alana sipped her latte. “Would Hannibal have let you keep them all?”

A tick of irritation passed his face. “Hannibal doesn’t have the final say. If that’s what I wanted, then yes.”

“You’re cohabitating. How is that going?” Her voice was friendly and supportive. Will didn’t buy it.

“Are we back in therapy?” he asked.

Alana sighed. “We never terminated our therapist-patient relationship. I typically have at least one closing session. Hope you brought your checkbook.”

Will didn’t smile at the joke. “You’re concerned.”

“You look well,” she said, “but I’m uninformed. You went through several traumatic experiences, as did Hannibal. You also told me about some concerning behavior in your relationship with Hannibal.”

Will looked amused. “We’re working out our relationship issues.”

That didn’t pacify Alana. “You have to understand how this looks. You were certain that Hannibal had framed you. You told me he drugged you! And the first day you see him after your hospitalization, you go back to him.”

“Thought you would be happy to see me free from my delusion.” Will wasn’t entirely successful in keeping the bite from his words. He sighed. “I don’t want to be in therapy with you, Alana. Hannibal and I have both been through a lot. Like I told Jack, we need space.”

Alana bristled at the comparison. “I’m glad you’re setting boundaries with Jack. What about with Hannibal?”

Will looked off to the side. At a long table, patrons were working on their laptops and chatting animatedly to each other. The day was clear and bright. A father came in to the shop pushing his kid in a stroller. “Have you ever been kidnapped, Alana?” Will asked. He looked back at her. “Do you know what it’s like to hear your captor come through the door and wonder whether they’ll feed you or beat you? Do you know what it’s really like to starve?”

Her eyes were wide and sympathetic. Maybe if Will was lucky, he would never see her look at him with disgust and rage. She had been good to him. She had tried. Maybe they could spare her. When it became obvious that Will was waiting for her to respond, she said, “No, Will. I don’t understand what you’ve been through. But I would like to try.”

“There’s nothing for me to get out of therapy with you,” Will said. “And I won’t tolerate any more accusations about my relationship with Hannibal.”

“You just missed Jack,” Hannibal said lightly, when Will returned home. “A remarkable coincidence, that he came to visit when Alana did.”

“They suspect us,” Will said.

Hannibal handed Will his ipad and returned to his task of cleaning the kitchen counters. A page on TattleCrime was open, and for the first time Will read about his own crime. It was thrilling to be the owner of secret knowledge and to read about the FBI scrambling for clues. The Mutilator, renamed the Resin Man, was photographed as Will and Abigail left him — decapitated in his RV, propped up against the fridge and facing away from his dead captive. As much as Will had wanted to change the boy’s body, he wanted the unit to be able to identify him and understand what the Resin Man had done.

“I gave you an alibi with me, the dates around his murder,” Hannibal explained. “It also appears that Chilton will make a miraculous recovery. The bullet just missed his brain. I’m afraid he will be very ugly, but at least the world will not be deprived of his intellect.”

Will smirked, and asked, “Does Chilton have alibis?”

Hannibal shrugged. “It’s possible. The story was never meant to be ironclad.”

“We should leave soon,” Will said, rubbing his neck. “Let’s talk with Abby about it after the meeting. Are the dogs out back?”

Will retreated somewhat into his old self when meeting prospective owners of his dogs, a little shy, but passionate about his pack. Hannibal served the older couple tea as Will introduced Buster and talked through his history and temperament.

At dinner, Hannibal served actual lamb, since his entire supply of human meat had gone to Chilton’s. Abigail asked after their conversations with Alana and Jack respectively.

“So are we leaving soon?” Abigail asked eagerly. “I’m getting a little tired of hiding in plain sight.”

“We have passports,” Hannibal said. “And I am nearly ready to leave my patients, with a little book burning.”

“Are we just going to disappear into the night?” Will asked.

Hannibal gave him a guarded look. “It would certainly be the safest route. But that doesn’t appeal to you.”

Will took a sip of wine, pensive. “I want them to know, without a doubt, that I am not your victim, and you are not mine.” He glanced across the table to Abigail. “It feels wrong to leave them with their misconceptions.”

“Isn’t it enough that we understand each other?” Abigail asked. “I’m dead, I’d prefer to stay that way, and I don’t really care what Alana or Jack thinks.”

“Just feels like loose ends,” Will said with a frown. “I don’t want to put us at risk for the sake of leaving a message, though.”

“Jack won’t stop looking for you,” Hannibal said to Will.

“Or you, once he’s figured out that you’re the Ripper.”

“Then let’s bring them to us,” Abigail said. “After we leave the country we’ll have time to figure out what we want to say, how we want them to see us.” She grinned. “Wrapping up loose ends is fake, anyway. Not everything in life is so elegant.”

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[One Week Later]

Will threw the black-bound notebook on the fire, and watched as Hannibal's notes on him burned — ink gleaming in the firelight, pages curling and alighting, a deformed clock burning like his brain had with the encephalitis. Hannibal's notes on all his patients were meticulous, organized by some arcane system of colored dots, and reflected hundreds of hours of work, all lost to the flame.

Time had reversed for Abigail. In some ways, for Will and Hannibal; but it wasn't returning to a previous relationship. Will had stopped trying to freeze time around a precious moment that felt doomed to be lost. He didn't want to go back.

Hannibal joined him at the fire, close enough to scent the nape of Will's neck. "When all this is gone," Hannibal said, "my memories will remain, preserved in the halls of my mind palace. A sacred place of words and breath and the shedding of veils."

"We don't need to live in the past, Hannibal."

Hannibal stepped around Will and tossed two notebooks on the fire. "If I am ever caught, I will live there."

Will looked at him directly, a knot in his stomach. "We won't be caught. I can't let that happen."

Hannibal tilted his head, and looked back at Will, amused. "We both have unfinished business with players on the stage. You want them to see."

Will swallowed. He did, and knew that desire came with risks. He couldn't bear the thought of separation from Hannibal and Abigail. "We're family," Will said. "I can't lose that again."

Hannibal's gentle amusement turned to longing, then went somewhere cold and somber. Will felt the energy between them shift, layers falling to the wayside to expose a raw nerve. "It is a terrible thing," Hannibal said softly to the fire, "to lose one's family."

"Have you ever had a child?" Will asked.

Hannibal shook his head minutely. "No, but I was guardian to my younger sister." His eyes shone with firelight, and when he looked back at Will they were damp with tears. "Her name was Mischa."

Will felt the loss as his own. This was the trauma he had sensed in Hannibal before, a deeply buried darkness revealed when all else was stripped away. "What happened?" Will asked.

Hannibal almost shuddered — as much as he ever did, a tremble to his lips — and did not look away. "She was taken from me. So I ate her."

Will felt a tear slip down his cheek.

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[One Month Later]

Hannah Reid sat in the interview cage, glancing around the hall with faint amusement. She looked less sickly than the last time Jack had seen her, no longer dangerously underweight, though the way she moved was feral and unsettling. “Hello, Ms. Reid,” Jack said curtly, not sitting down in the folding chair. “I’d like to ask you a few questions about Hannibal Lecter.”

Hannah’s eyes snapped from the ceiling to Jack, wide and interested. She smiled, as if to a secret joke. “Hannibal… who?” she asked.

“Doctor Hannibal Lecter,” Jack repeated patiently. “He’s a psychiatrist who paid you a visit about a month ago. He introduced you to your nutritionist and current therapist.”

“Oh… yes,” Hannah said brightly. “I do remember him, after all. We had some very productive and therapeutic conversations.” She tilted her head to one side. “What about him?”

Jack narrowed his eyes. “Shortly after he visited you, he disappeared, along with one Will Graham.”

“I do remember him,” Hannah said.

“I was hoping you could tell me what Dr. Lecter talked to you about. You were one of the last people to speak to him.”

Hannah considered Jack. Her odd eyes would have unnerved him if he wasn’t so hardened against the violently insane. “He wanted to make sure I was left in good hands,” she explained. “A good therapist settles things with his patients before retiring from his practice.”

Jack frowned. “Dr. Lecter wasn’t your therapist.”

“Oh, but he was.” Hannah’s voice dropped low. “From the period of late November to February. I was in his books as Marie Ward. You know, I’ve always found it difficult to work with therapist I couldn’t relate to, which is why Hannibal was so easy to talk to. Once I saw his work, I knew I had to meet him.”

“His work,” Jack repeated stiffly.

Hannah chuckled. “I mean, you’re probably not going to believe me.” She gestured around the room, and then pointed to herself. “I’m certifiably insane. And a chronic liar. But I’m going to guess that Dr. Chilton is vehemently proclaiming his innocence, saying he’s been framed just like Will Graham. And the pieces of that story don’t quite line up, do they?”

“Did Dr. Lecter tell you where he was going?” Jack asked, anger tucked away behind his jaw.

“No. Of course not,” Hannah replied, lips twitching around a wide smile of delight. “But he did ask me to tell you--” And her voice dropped even lower, tongue thick on a strange accent. “Don’t worry, Jack. You’ll be hearing from me and my family.”

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Will watched the dancers climb the high pole in their ceremonial garb. In the sweltering heat, high up against the clear blue sky, the *danza de los voladores* commenced, four men swinging out on ropes tied to their feet, spinning around the pole while the fifth played the flute at the top.

“According to myth, it was a ceremony created to end drought,” Abigail explained beside him, face sheltered from the sun by a wide brimmed hat. “The gods felt neglected and so they withheld the rains, and this dance was created to appease them.”

“I’ve never seen a dance like that before,” Will said, watching the men spin around and around. During their trip, Abigail had taken to learning about the local history and sharing with them. Edifying and reciting was a habit learned from Hannibal, in part to please him, but also reflected her genuine love for learning. Between the two of them, Will sometimes felt less like he was on vacation and more like he was back in school.

They entered Teotihuacan, and even the swarm of tourists was dwarfed by the ancient city’s size. Pyramids of sun-bleached stone rose on either side of a long avenue, as monumental as the blue summer sky above. The three walked down the avenue of the dead, observing the vast space that was once a huge, vibrant city at the peak of an empire. Even amongst these wonders, Will’s attention slid back to his companions, for they were just as miraculous. Abigail with her dark hair grown down to her collar, pink scar flagrantly on display, soaking up her surroundings greedily. She was getting tan in the Mexican sun, freckles blooming across her shoulders and cheeks, looking healthier and more animated than she ever had in the States. Hannibal looked just as much at home here as he did anywhere, his three-piece suits traded for linen resort wear, someone remaining crisply groomed and pressed in this heat. He had grown his beard out, keeping it neat, and his hair was streaked with more silver and gold.

A Cannibal, a Cannibal’s daughter, and an FBI profiler all walk down the Avenue of the Dead…

“The Aztecs walked through these ruins and imagined a shared ancestry with the Teotihuacanos,” Hannibal said as they examined an ancient mural. “Their culture was inspired in part by these monuments, but what they built would dwarf this city.”

“Did the Teotihuacanos also practice human sacrifice?” Will asked.

Will did not need to see the glimmer of amusement behind Hannibal’s sunglasses to know it was there. More and more, Will was aware of his companions instinctually, a shared

wavelength that did not rely on sight. For them, Will's empathy was wide open. "They did," Hannibal said. "Remains have been found during excavations, both human and animal. Enemy warriors were decapitated, buried alive, or their hearts torn out. Animals that were considered sacred were also buried alive while imprisoned in cages: cougars, owls, eagles, wolves, and venomous snakes."

"It's hardly an uncommon practice," Abigail chimed in, a bit blasé. "In cultures across the world, people were sacrificed to appease gods and keep order. The Aztecs were just particularly prolific."

"In the reconstruction of the Great Pyramid of Tenochtitlan it's believed by some that 80,000 people were sacrificed," Hannibal said brightly. "Though numbers were likely inflated by fear mongering propaganda. Still, the most conservative estimates are several hundred per year in Tenochtitlan alone. I look forward to visiting that site."

"I should have pegged you as a cannibal as soon as you started waxing poetic about the Aztecs," Will said dryly.

"They didn't eat them," Abigail pointed out with a roll of her eyes. "Tibetans, on the other hand…"

They walked up the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, standing atop some 200 human sacrifices. Up hundreds of stone steps to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun, they weaved around the tourists and observed them as anthropological oddities in their own right. The view was spectacular, obstructed as it was by visitors taking pictures on their phones, and after the long climb Will felt envigored, the sun in his skin and his bones set as firmly as the ancient, colossal stone.

They visited Chichen Itza and saw the great ball court where games were played in lue of battles fought, and the Sacred Cenote where sacrifices were tossed to the underworld. They toured the country's natural wonders, getting sticky with sweat on jungle hikes and washing clean in clear pools under the mouths of caves. In cities Hannibal dressed them up for fancy dinners; Abigail and Will wandered the streets in the evening, trying new candies from street vendors and tipping the street artists. But they all preferred the smaller towns by the coast, where kids haggled them for coin and Will was scolded more than once for feeding the stray dogs and cats outside of establishments. Abigail swam with tame sharks kept in an aquatic pen outside one restaurant, marveling at the feel of their scales as Will and Hannibal watched on.

After fulfilling their hunger for travel, they retired in Costa Rica on a private beach. The house was fully equipped and ready for them when they arrived, and the next day Will picked up Winston and Zoe from the pet hotel. (It never ceased to amaze Will how much easier it was to move through the world with wealth.) In the mornings, Will ran with the dogs on the beach until he ached, and washed off the sweat in the ocean. He was welcomed back in the house with Abigail and Hannibal and a hearty breakfast. They spent their days getting tan, eating well, settling into the home, and exploring the city.

Healing was a slow and imperfect process for all of them. Two months after they left the states, and Will had regained his appetite and some of his lost weight. It helped that they ate amazingly, but still, sometimes Will could only taste ash in his mouth and his stomach closed like a fist for days. Sometimes when Will poured himself an extra drink Hannibal's eyes went cold, and Will felt the snarl of self-destruction and drank just because he could. Sometimes Will couldn't watch Hannibal perform his physical therapy exercises for his hands without feeling sick. Sometimes when those hands were on him or Hannibal whispered in his ear, Will would freeze and flash and overload, jerk out of his arms in a sudden panic. It wasn't predictable or a trigger that would always flip, but when it did Will was left sick to the bone.

Will knew it was trauma. Hannibal said as much, explaining to Will what was happening in his mind and body, as if he wasn't the one to primarily inflict that trauma. As if explaining it made it go away. Hannibal tried and failed to hide his disappointment in the lingering, unintended symptoms of his manipulations, and Will disguised his fear of weakness with anger. They drew apart and together again like tides.

It was impossible to brood and avoid as long as Will and Hannibal would have liked with Abigail there. She was aware as soon as something was off between them, and prodded them to rebalance. ("If I have to hear you two at night, then you better stop looking so glum in the morning," she snapped at them once.) And they reconciled, less with words than with touches, both reverent and punishing. But the underlying problem still remained.

Hannibal was riding him brutally on their bed, tan skin slick with sweat and hair in his eyes. Each slam of his body down on Will's made him grunt with a full bodied jolt of sensation. Hannibal gripped Will's pectorals, using the leverage to fuck himself, teeth gritted from the exertion. He was blissed out, animalistic, taking what he needed from Will and giving as only he could.

It was only when Hannibal slowed his fervent pace and his eyes shifted from aroused to calculating, that Will realized he was growing numb and unresponsive beneath his lover. "Don't stop," Will panted, though now that he was paying attention his stomach felt cold. He gripped Hannibal's knees in encouragement. "It's good, it's good."

Hannibal didn't seem to buy it. He settled his weight fully on Will's cock, face flickering with the deep sensation, then cupped Will's cheek and made him meet his eyes. Will felt like he was looking at Hannibal from a distance. "What is it, Will?" Hannibal asked gently.

"Nothing," Will said too quickly, looking away. There was an edge to his voice that betrayed him. He hated that his body was doing this to him — he wanted to have sex! He was fine having sex with Hannibal, but the discomfort kept returning and making him slip into a fog.

Hannibal sighed atop him, and at once his features were flat. "Are you sure?" Hannibal asked, but the kindness and warmth had dried up.

Will groaned and rubbed his eyes. "Yeah. Don't want to keep you from finishing."

Hannibal grabbed Will under the jaw and pressed his head into the pillow, looming over him and demanding eye contact. “I don’t just want to finish,” he said icily.

“Then get off my dick,” Will snapped.

Hannibal looked at him without emotion, everything walled off between them. Then, abruptly, he got off of Will, making him wince at the sudden cold air around his cock. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed in silence, and that only made Will feel worse — it always made him feel worse. Will placed his hands over his face as he retreated further in on himself, the darkness and pressure on his sinuses a small comfort as all the arousal and closeness rushed out of the room. Without the constant friction of Hannibal’s body, Will’s cock was flaccid in a minute.

“You didn’t have to stop,” Will said quietly, feeling a bit pathetic. “I didn’t want you to stop.”

“You would have me continue until your discomfort was such that I would repulse you?” Hannibal asked flatly.

“You never needed my comfort or consent before,” Will accused, knowing the words were a petty barb. He sighed in frustration. They had had this conversation before.

“And now, that I need it?”

Will opened his eyes and looked over at Hannibal. He was guarded and irritated but he had not turned his back, yet. There were a thousand things Will could say to sting him and push him away, give himself the space needed to recover and shore up his defenses, to feel safe. Will swallowed around the lump in his throat. “I don’t want to feel like this Hannibal,” Will said. “I don’t know how to stop feeling this way. And if you won’t be intimate with me until I’m… *fixed.* ” The word barely came out between his teeth. “Then I don’t — *I don’t know* , Hannibal.”

I don’t know if I can be fixed.

“You’re not broken,” Hannibal said.

Will gave a weak laugh, and looked up at the ceiling. He felt like if he came back to his body he might start to cry.

Hannibal crawled back onto the bed and laid next to Will, turned towards him and close but not touching. “What did you feel?” he asked quietly.

Will rubbed his face. “I don’t know. I think it was just —“ He rubbed his pectorals. “You were gripping me here, and… when I was in the hospital…” Will squeezed his eyes shut. His heart was pounding in his ribs, and he felt the ghosts of hands hovering above his body, waiting to touch. “I had this recurring nightmare. I couldn’t move, and these invisible claws touched me all over. They sank into me, and pulled me apart.” He bent his fingers into claws and pushed down on his chest to demonstrate.

Hannibal squeezed his arm above the elbow. “You felt violated,” he said quietly.

Will took a shuddering breath, eyes still closed. His hands flattened and splaying over his belly, protective. “Yes,” he agreed. “I thought you were going to rip me open and pull out my heart.” Will opened his eyes and turned his head to look at Hannibal, and found him looking at Will with unconcealed longing. “That’s what it felt like you were doing.”

Slowly, with steady pressure, Hannibal slid his palm up Will’s arm and across his shoulder to hover over his heart. “Your heart is a hard-won prize,” he said. “If you were to give it to me, I would guard it with the utmost care and reverence.”

In your belly, Will thought with dark humor. “If?” he asked, voice quaking. “You don’t feel as if you’ve taken it already?”

Hannibal shook his head. “You haven’t given it to me yet.”

“You think I haven’t?” Will’s voice was barely a rasp. Heat pricked behind his eyes. “I’ve given you everything.”

Hannibal kissed Will’s shoulder gently. “You do not allow yourself to be truly vulnerable around me,” Hannibal said. “For brief moments, I feel you unguarded, and then you draw closed again. After everything you’ve been through, and what I’ve done, it’s hardly surprising. I will wait however long it takes to have you completely open with me.”

“You’ve hardly been patient,” Will said defensively.

Hannibal sighed through his nose. “No, Will, and I apologize. When I feel you close off from me, it affects me.”

“You get angry,” Will pointed out.

“I feel frustration,” Hannibal admitted. His mouthed worked as if it were difficult to form the word. “Doubt.”

“And?” Will pressed.

Hannibal’s eyes fluttered shut. He breathed deeply through his nose, and when he looked back at Will he seemed cracked open. “I am reminded of watching you leave through those shed doors and wondering if, when I managed to free myself, I would find you dead. I remember watching you bleed out from your femoral artery and wondering if I had tied the ropes too tightly to free myself in time to save you.”

Will felt his eyes mist over, and Hannibal’s features blurred. “Abigail was there, though,” he said. “Once you told me she was alive, I couldn’t… even though I wanted to disappear.”

“Then, if she was dead, you would have left me?”

Will turned on his side, and ran his hand through Hannibal’s hair. “I don’t know what I would have done,” he said honestly. “If I skipped town, you would have found me eventually. I might have tried to catch you.” He gripped the back of his neck firmly, made Hannibal look at him and hear him clearly. “But I’m not leaving now. Nothing makes sense without you. It’s just difficult, and I still hurt, and it makes me feel like a failure.”

Hannibal's eyes flashed. "No. Never."

Will saw his sincerity, and it made something flutter in his chest. But Hannibal wanted more — he wanted everything Will could possibly give, and Will didn't know if he could give it. If he wanted to. And if he didn't, then what? He might never cease to struggle with himself.

Will sighed heavily and turned his cheek into the pillow. Hannibal pulled closer to him and rubbed circles into his back. Hannibal hummed, a deep rumble in his chest. "Perhaps you should punish me," he said in a low, devious voice, "for disobeying you."

Will opened one eye to give him an incredulous look. There was good humor in Hannibal's expression, but a deep longing as well, just beneath the surface. "You want me to punish you," Will said. It was barely a question, and Hannibal said nothing, staring calmly back at him. "If I want to punish you," Will amended quietly.

Hannibal gave a slow blink. "Am I not deserving?" he asked.

Will smiled, but it was restrained. He took Hannibal's hand from his back and brought it to his mouth, kissing his knuckles. "Oh yes," Will answered, voice husky. "We've already thoroughly established that you are deserving of my punishment." He rubbed his lips back and forth against one finger, sighing softly. "If I want or need you to stop, I will tell you, okay? I don't want you to treat me delicately."

It was, in its own way, a lot to ask. Hannibal did not want to hurt him and widen the gulf between them, and Will was still prone to self-destruction. "Very well, Will," Hannibal said after a moment, and they pulled closer together.

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[Two weeks later]

Will watched Hannibal tear through the surf, swimming alongside the shore out beyond where the waves crested. He was dwarfed by the clear blue ocean, just a blip of data across the vast surface of water. Abigail was lying next to Will, half reading and half dozing in the shade of their beach umbrella, every now and again resting the book on her face and falling back asleep. Zoe was curled up by Will's hip and he petted her absentmindedly as he watched Hannibal. Winston ran along the beach, chasing Hannibal.

"How am I so tired from doing nothing?" Abigail mumbled, lifting the book off her face and laying it aside.

"It's the heat," Will said with a smile. "Laziness begets laziness."

She propped herself up on her elbows, stretching her long, tan legs. “I might jump in again,” she said, and then cast him a sly look. “Seems like you’re enjoying the view.”

Will was protected partially from her scrutiny by sunglasses, but it wasn’t much of a defense. “It is a lovely day,” he said mildly, and Abigail snorted.

Hannibal finally emerged from the ocean, skin glittering in the sun. He had tanned the most out of all of them, and his skin was deeply bronze. He walked up the beach towards him in his small swim trunks, muscular and graceful as a dancer, always. Will felt a stab of arousal at the sight of him, and kept his face neutral since Abigail was in a teasing mood.

“Oh yes,” Abigail said, eyebrows high. “It is such a *hot* day.”

It was a playful game between them, and Will didn’t allow himself to rise to the bait. Not much, anyway. “Maybe you should get in the water then,” Will suggested to her.

Hannibal stopped before them, Winston at his heels, eager for play. “May I join you?” Hannibal asked them politely. From this close Will could see the rivulets of water cascade down his chest and thighs.

“Mm… Take my spot,” Abigail decided, swinging to her feet. “C’mon, Winston!” She darted off and the dog chased her happily, and she threw a look over her shoulder at Will that was both daring and fond.

Hannibal took her seat besides Will, and Zoe got up, stretched, and went around to sit by Hannibal’s side. Will shook his head at her. “She does like you better than me.”

“Nonsense,” Hannibal said, pleased, and scratched her behind the ear. “I’m sure she loves us all equally.”

Will chuckled. He watched Abigail play with Winston, darting up and down the wet sand, chasing the waves. He felt both a settled satisfaction in his chest, and a low burn of arousal from having Hannibal’s attention on him. And Hannibal was paying attention to him, staring without reserve. “I still don’t feel like I can have this,” Will said, but his voice was light. “We’re impossibilities: you, me, Abigail. An illusion that stretches to fill every inch of reality.”

“We made a place in the world for our family,” Hannibal said with a fond, wisp of a smile. “I can assure you, it is as real as anything else.”

Abigail shrieked in delight as a wave caught her, dashing back up the bank with Winston at her heels.

“I want you to dominate me,” Will said. Hannibal’s silent shock made him grin, and he glanced over, head tilted coyly by his shoulder. He admired the bob in Hannibal’s throat as he swallowed, the dark hunger behind his eyes. Everything so clearly controlled, as he needed to be.

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Hannibal asked, tone curious.

“Yes,” Will said. “I want to try. I want to feel what’s different. I want you to help me break down the barriers.”

Heat bloomed behind Hannibal’s eyes, and he smiled faintly. “I would be very pleased to have your submission again,” he purred. “Though I must confess I have enjoyed your control immensely.”

“I thought you were just indulging me.”

Hannibal gave Will a pointed look. “And here I thought I was transparent to you.”

Will flushed a bit, and adjusted his glasses. “Not yet.” He bit his lip, considering and searching himself for his conviction. The fear was still there, and guilt and self-repulsion, but those obstacles suddenly seemed further apart, like he could weave between them and see the entirety of them at once. Or maybe it was just the expanse of beach and ocean, settling in his mind and body. No more captivity in small cages.

Will breathed in the salt air and laid back on the beach towel. He took off his glasses and beckoned Hannibal closer with a look. He bent over Will and stroked through his hair, hands still cool from the water, face close and open and fond. “I adore seeing you like this,” Hannibal said softly. “Relaxed and radiant. And --” Hannibal leaned in to speak against Will’s ear, making him shiver. “-- I will adore seeing you bent and thrashing and uncaged.”

Will felt a wire being plucked behind his ribs, thrumming deep and sonorous beneath his skin. He knew Hannibal could feel it too, as he withdrew with a look both self-satisfied and reverent, pressing a quick kiss to Will’s lips that tasted of salt and promise.

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[Three months later]

Will tasted blood on his teeth.

It was thick and hot, and he imagined that it still pulsed on his tongue, as the entire basement did to the rhythm of the man’s heart beating visibly from his exposed chest. He could feel the life of their victim vibrate through his skin -- could feel himself, Hannibal, and Abigail all share breath and thought and body.

Abigail, dressed in her own plastic suit, was panting with the force of their shared violence. Her eyes were huge and dark and hungry. Hannibal was the most composed of them all, standing over the body with his surgeon’s scalpel, looking proud and watchful. He had already taken all that they wanted from the man.

“Do you want to feel it?” Hannibal asked Will.

Will shuddered violently. He felt like he was about to spin out of his mind, having just passed the point of no return. His body was too thin to contain him, the cement walls of this room were no cage for him, he was *flying* . “Yes,” he said weakly.

Like a man possessed, Will floated closer to the operating table and stared into the beautiful cavity of his chest. He reached out with one hand and touched the heart. He could feel it beat through the thin gloves, and Will’s eyes rolled heavenward at the sensation. Aching, unsteady on his feet, Will wrapped his hand around the heart.

He pulled it out of the man’s chest with an ecstatic groan, and without thinking brought the pulsing organ to his lips. Will tore into the heart and blood washed over his tongue, his chin; he tore the strong muscles with sharp teeth and felt it beating against his lips.

He was here.

He was now.

He was powerful.

Will offered the heart to Abigail and she took it in her hands like something sacred, biting down viciously and soaking her own face in blood. When she passed it to Hannibal, it had nearly ceased its twitching. They stood close, over the body. Hannibal’s bite of the heart was almost polite, lips closing round the flesh in rapture.

They were gods -- blood-stained maws hungry for sacrifice, beautiful and unashamed in their monstrocity. They looked at the others, finding in each a reflection of their own self, an image to hold and care and love. There was no skin between them, here. No lines drawn, no piece chipped away. And the blood, the blood, flowed between the family.

This is our design.

Will licked the blood away from Hannibal’s jaw before the shower could clean it away. Hannibal did the same for him, monsters grooming each other with hungry tongues. Will took Hannibal’s skull in his hands, wrenching his gaze away from bloody teeth to sink into the abyss of Hannibal’s eyes.

“I love you.”

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[Four months later]

Hannibal found Will in their altar room, standing lax with his hands in the pockets of his shorts. “Here you are,” Hannibal said fondly, stepping inside and closing the heavy door behind him.

Will tilted his head, not quite looking over his shoulder. Hannibal could never resist that coy pose and he was lured close, wrapping his hands around Will’s stomach and scenting his neck. “It’s hard to say goodbye,” Will said, nuzzling against Hannibal before looking back at their collection.

“Farewells are always difficult. So many people avoid them, and fail to acknowledge when it's time to say goodbye.”

“It’s strange to think that we’re never coming back here.”

“It feels like home.”

Will smiled, and looked away from their works to turn in Hannibal’s arms. “We are home,” he pointed out. “Wherever we go, we’ll have each other.”

The adoring look on Hannibal’s face was by now familiar, and it no longer made Will think of loss. It made him feel loved. “Are you satisfied with what we have accomplished here?” Hannibal asked, darkness teasing from beneath the surface.

Will laughed freely. “Oh, I think this will give Jack plenty to work with. I’m… proud, of our work.” Will grinned and leaned in, showing Hannibal his fangs. “But I wouldn’t say my hunger has been sated.”

They kissed, delighted. When they parted, Will was tempted to look back one last time, at the stone daisies where pairs of severed human hands lay, preserved and artfully arranged in miniature tableaus. But he didn’t need to look again. The memory of each kill was etched vibrantly into the sacred places of his mind. And besides, his beloved was looking at him -- and he was looking at his beloved.

Will looked down at their clasped hands, heart full to bursting. “What do you see in them?” Hannibal asked.

“I see us,” Will said. “Just as we are.”

Chapter End Notes

-cries-
I've been writing this series for ten months AND ITS OVER, jesus christ. I got re-obsessed with Hannibal and wanted to write a dirty kinky fic that had all my favorite fucked up things, and from that humble, sinful beginning I now have a newfound love of erotica and community amongst the fannibals. I'm currently getting paid to make erotica comics, which you'll be able to read over on slipshine by the end of the month, and I

have so many ideas for comics and novellas for the future. if you want to follow my work, find me on tumblr!

thank you all so much from the bottom of my heart for joining me on this roller coaster ride to hell. all of your comments have meant so much to me, and I'm truly grateful for the fannibals I have met along the way. I can't even describe the kind of catharsis I experience in writing this dark, hard fic and connecting with people over it. even if you have never commented I am still so grateful that you've read this!!
I sincerely hope this ending felt satisfying to you. the boys still have a LOT that they work through in their relationship, and learning to be a family with Abigail. it wasn't in the scope of this fic for me to address all of that, and neither did I want to write a trilogy. I may write some short timestamps of murder!family and all the kinky shit I want them to do. if you have any questions about how things work out for them, or any prompts, feel free to send me an ask on tumblr. but I do feel like the boys have been through so much and have worked so hard to come back together.

keep on sinning,

worm

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!